THE PALMETTO PASSION

A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CHURCH OF GOD OF PROPHECY IN SOUTH CAROLINA

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To: my parents, Walter Baker and Ethel Boone Baker, who taught me, loved me, sheltered me, and released me. They introduced me to the Church of God of Prophecy from my infancy and exampled all biblical concepts of holiness and right living. To my children: Kenneth Dale Baker, Jr.; Kara DeAnn Baker Johnson; David Michael Isbell; Kristin Isbell Pike; and their companions. To my grandchildren: Brittany Baker; Cade Baker; Kylie Pike; Zachery Pike; Eden Johnson; and Lucas Isbell. Together with their parents they are the enduring legacy of my life and ministry. And, to the one He saved for me until it was time: my wife Robin Lynn Black Baker. Without her love, support, encouragement, and special assistance this project would not be complete and neither would I.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis sought to discover the beginnings, organization, development, and growth of the Church of God of Prophecy in South Carolina, and to identify key people, places, and events that were pivotal in this Pentecostal denomination's significant genealogy. The author used extensive archival research, review of existing literature, and interviews of eyewitnesses and participants to compile pertinent data. The research uncovered a 'sense of urgency' that motivated under-educated itinerate 'preachers' to travel from house to house with the goal of preaching the whole Gospel message leading the denomination to become an active participant in the Wesleyan Holiness/Pentecostal movement.

CHAPTER 1: AN OVERVIEW

The most powerful weapon on earth is the human soul on fire.
–Field Marshal Ferdinand Foch

INTRODUCTION

The saga of the Church of God of Prophecy (COGOP) in South Carolina is not dissimilar to the corporate histories of the Holiness/Pentecostal groups that surfaced during the latter part of the 1800s, continuing into the 20th and 21st centuries. Theirs is a story of endurance, perseverance, and expansion beyond reasonable expectations. More succinctly, it is the narrative of the passion, purpose and vision that fueled the flames of revival, giving birth to a worldwide movement of God.

The origins of the Church of God can be traced to the sparsely populated countryside and mountain boroughs where the corners of Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee meet where simple farmers, merchants, and itinerant missionaries faithfully and enthusiastically preaching the Word of God, as they comprehended it. Marked by fervent passion, clear vision, and a keen awareness of a divine calling to share the message entrusted to them by the Holy Spirit, these men and women who knew God were indeed powerful tools of the Lord, used to usher in a message of the Last Day's Church.[1]

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[1] A. J. Tomlinson saw the restoration of the church as a prophetic revelation, or reformation, in the last years of "the last days"—a mighty, final conflict between the spiritual mediocrity of "organized religion" and a worldwide biblically spiritual invasion by the true Church of God of the Scriptures. References to this view are manifold, but we cite two, by way of example—"The World Is Ours Through Christ" *Minutes, 31st Assembly*, 1936, General Overseer's Address, or *Historical Annual Addresses*, Vol. III, pages 17–24, and A. J. Tomlinson, *The Last Great Conflict* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1984), 162.

The spiritual gains those Holiness/Pentecostal Evangelists accomplished far exceeded their educational abilities and theological understandings.

The best way to fathom the emerging Holiness-Pentecostal movement at the close of the1800s is to catch a glimpse of the burning passion that these men and women had for proclaiming and publishing the Word of God. This passion created a desire to see every person reached with the full gospel message of Jesus Christ, to see all souls given the opportunity of accepting salvation, and to share the message of holiness in each community, village, and town. This craving to see God work and to be instruments in His hands reflects the intensity found in the first century church as men and women hazarded their lives to spread the gospel.[2]

In South Carolina, the history of the COGOP is honorable and glorious, full of storied lives and monumental advancements. The present is marked by the opportunities, challenges, and fears associated with rapid transition. The future is uncertain. However, the all-consuming passion for souls that totally consumed previous generations can be rekindled, and then the future will be bright.

Statement of Purpose

This dissertation proposes to identify, commemorate, and honor the vision and passion of the men and women who built the COGOP in South Carolina. Additionally, this study will seek answers to the questions: 1) has the evangelistic and church planting zeal of previous generations been lost, and 2) if so, how can it be reclaimed?

This study will review the surprising evolution of those independent Holiness congregations that sprang up as a result of their life changing messages and the living

[2] Tomlinson, *The Last Great Conflict,* 140.

examples of men and women who embraced the Wesleyan traditions. Their sermons were grounded on the need for true repentance, turning from sin and Satan, leading to genuine Salvation, and the doctrine of instantaneous, complete sanctification, and New Testament holiness.

Nondescript locations go unnoticed by most travelers, but this particular branch of the Holiness movement started in places such as Barney Creek, the Shearer schoolhouse in Cherokee County North Carolina, Burger Mountain, Culbertson, and Camp Creek, North Carolina. Rooted in the rugged soil the spiritual family tree would eventually spread throughout the world.

The story of the Church of God of Prophecy in South Carolina can be divided into several eras. The first encompassed the years preceding the genesis of the Church in South Carolina going back to the end of the 19th century. Men such as Richard Spurling, R. G. Spurling Jr., John Plemons, and deacon William F. Bryant, caught up in the fervor of the Holiness revival that spread through the Unicoi Mountains of western North Carolina sought fellowship with others who were of like mind and spirit.[3] To this devout group, Ambrose Jessop Tomlinson provided leadership and vision to take the small Holiness church from its roots in the southeastern United States to eventually encompass

[3] Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1997), 71-77.

the known world.[4] Consequently, Tomlinson's foot soldiers brought that Church of God message to South Carolina between 1912 and 1913.[5]

Next will be a review of the events and people involved in the disputes that led to a traumatic split occurring in the church in the early years of the roaring 1920s. While there is much disagreement as to the reasons for the conflict, Vinson Synan concludes that the internal disruption was the result of a power struggle between Tomlinson and other supporters of F.J. Lee.[6] The events of 1922 and 1923 would forever change the dynamics and history of both groups. Those who aligned with A.J. Tomlinson after his forced separation from the church he had guided for 20 years would eventually be given the legal identifier: the Church of God of Prophecy.[7]

Even as Tomlinson was starting over from scratch, rebuilding of his vision of the Church of God, so also his constituents in South Carolina were likewise starting over with no churches, ministers, and few, if any active members. This study will reveal recently uncovered records of the 12 dark and desperate years in the South Carolina church following the 1923 commotion.

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[4] In 1903 in addition to the Holiness Church at Camp Creek, the records show the operation of a work in Georgia, and two in Tennessee. At the time of the Church split of 1922-23 there were 666 reported churches with 21,076 members. After the Church split of 1922-23 almost nothing remained faithful to A.J. Tomlinson. However, by the time of his death in 1943 most of the lost ground was regained as 480 churches were listed under his leadership.

[5] According to the North Walhalla Church of God website: "Sometime around 1912 to 1913 a man of God by the name of J.C. Underwood boarded a train in Tennessee and headed for South Carolina. On July 15, 1914, the first Church of God in South Carolina was organized with eighteen members," accessed November 6, 2012, http://www.nwcogonline.com/history.html.

[6] Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition,* 197.

[7] The Name, Church of God of Prophecy was given to the Tomlinson branch of the Church of God as a compromise agreement in 1952. As a result of litigation over the name, "Church of God" Chancellor Glenn W. Woodlee ruled that the Tomlinson group could use either the name Tomlinson Church of God which was completely unacceptable to Tomlinson's followers or The Church of God of Prophecy.

By 1935, if the Church were to survive, much less thrive, it would require a dynamic man of captivating passion to come on the scene; a man with much the same vision of A.J. Tomlinson and empowered by the same Spirit of God. Just such a man was Eustis Austin McDonald, Sr. (more commonly known by his initials: E. A. McDonald).

McDonald's arrival of 1935 ushered in a new era of rapid growth and expansionism for the COGOP that would continue for 40 years. By the time McDonald left South Carolina in 1960, the work had grown from six struggling, infant churches to 83 functioning churches,[8] from a small hand full of itinerant ministers to a total of 161.[9] "The records show that E. A. McDonald, Sr. licensed about 261 Evangelist and 20 Bishops while he was in South Carolina."[10]

This study will review not only McDonald's tenure of leadership but also focus on significant clergy and leaders who were raised up to perform marvelously during the era. Likewise, like spokes coming from the hub of a wheel, vital churches served as centers for growth and expansion in various regions of the state. An effort will be made to identify these churches as well as track their spheres of influence.

Of necessity this study will trace the development of cultural and ethnic outreach efforts in the state by looking at the historical evolution of the Church's interactions with African-Americans and Hispanics. Navigating through the minefield of Jim Crow laws and the civil rights movement, the church has faced all of

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[8] W. M. Shepard and Eufaula Shepard, *My Adventures With God* (Greenville, SC: Southern Historical Press. 1997), 211.
[9] Shepard and Shepard, *My Adventures with God*, 212.
[10] Shepard and Shepard, *My Adventures with God*, 217.

the same tensions universally experienced in the American South. The struggle will be addressed in acknowledgment of the 'Gloriously Inglorious' dispensation.[11]

The years of rapid expansionism and growth continued through the early 1970s before giving way to a generation of stagnation and decline. This paper will attempt to identify the reasons for, the people involved, and the events that facilitated the subsequent downturn affecting both membership and church totals. A thorough review of national trends as well as international church dynamics will be necessary to illuminate the occurrences.

The last two decades have been eventful in the COGOP around the world. The vision and passion that birthed the great period of rapid expansionism in southeastern American states in the late 1920s through the early 1970s has been resurrected in other regions of the world as Church membership has exploded on the African continent, Central and South America, and most remarkably, in the former Soviet Union. However, it is noteworthy that in the U.S. there have been dramatic modifications to church polity and doctrine that have caused obstructions and stumbling blocks to church growth.

This review of the past two decades will include reflections of how the Church's official renunciation of long held doctrinal position has given vent to multiple splinter groups. The quintessential question is: What effect did the emergence of the new denominations, created by former church luminaries, have on existing churches and membership groups in South Carolina?

Lastly, this paper seeks to identify not only the causes for the loss of passion, purpose, and corporate vision in the church, but more importantly, address the question: Can and will the Church of God of Prophecy in South Carolina, and more generally, in

[11] See Chapter 7 of this work.

the United States, regain the passion, purpose, and vision that brought remarkable growth during the first half of the 20th century?[12]

Background of the Proposal

My interest in the history of the Church of God of Prophecy in South Carolina came about quite naturally. One of the first churches in the state was organized on my grandparent's sharecropper farm in a primitive brush arbor along the side of the highway. Consequently, as one who cut his teeth own the church pews, the DNA of the South Carolina church can be found in my family tree.

While attending College in Cleveland, Tennessee in the early 1970s I was exposed to denominational leaders as well as the legendary Tomlinson family. Subsequent trips to Cherokee County, North Carolina, the birthplace of the 20th century Church of God movement, further awakened with in me a sense of legacy and identity.

After graduating from Tomlinson College in 1972 I began my ministry experience under the mentoring of legendary Overseer M.S. Curry. Curry, a Pentecostal pioneer who began his ministry in the 1920s, was a personal friend of A.J. Tomlinson and had once served as his pastor. By the time he arrived in South Carolina he had 30 years experience as an Overseer in other states. During the five years I worked with him, often serving as his chauffeur, he was my mentor, pouring into me countless stories of the rich history of the Pentecostal movement, and, equally importantly, the Church of God story.

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[12] While revival fires have waned in the Palmetto State, there is a remarkable season of revival happening in various parts of the world. For the COGOP the past two decades have been fruitful in the Ukraine, Africa, Central and South America where the gospel seed, once planted, is bringing forth fruit a hundredfold. In the Ukraine COGOP membership totals surpassed the US less than 15 years after the first mission church was organized in 1992. COGOP population in Africa now exceeds 1 million. Central America also boasts larger membership and church totals than the US and in Peru there are projections of over 1000 churches by 2020.

His remarkable accounts of the people he had known, the places he had been, and his personal experiences birthed in me an abiding respect for my spiritual ancestry and a hunger to know more.

After 28 years of active ministry in the Church, in 2000 I was appointed to serve as State Overseer of my home state, South Carolina. I was appalled and disheartened upon discovering how little written documentation remained to chronicle the early years of history. During each State Convention of the Churches I assigned people to the task of documenting church history. Unfortunately, none possessed my appetite for the project. Thus little was accomplished during my eight-year tenure to fulfill the mandate.

When I retired from Presbyterian duties in 2008 and returned to local church ministry, I had opportunity to resume my formal studies. By the time I decided to undertake the task of writing a comprehensive dissertation I had previously amassed large quantities of historical and anecdotal data related to the history of the Church in South Carolina. It was now evident that I was the one with the desire, heritage, and experience for this undertaking.

This then is an effort to chronicle the lives, times, people, places, and events that shaped a noble denomination. A vital starting point for understanding the evolution of the church movement in South Carolina is to focus on each State Overseer's times and stories; examining their strengths and weaknesses as well as the lasting accomplishments. While historical documentation is regrettably limited, there is ample archival data to form a basis for this study.

Numerous expeditions into church archives have opened windows to the past that were previously sealed. One such episode of revelation occurred while I researched the

years of desperation following the 1923 church split. It had previously been concluded that there was no work being attempted or accomplished in South Carolina during the 12 years preceding the arrival of E.A. McDonald. However, as personal letters and ancient periodical notations were uncovered, a myriad of remarkable, albeit long forgotten people, were reborn as their stories were resurrected after 90 years of burial.

This work has taken me through unexpected emotional highs and lows. The inspirational accounts of early church pioneers who hazarded their own lives and suffered immeasurable hardships in order to carry the Gospel's torch fills the heart with a sense of wonder and awe. This study rediscovers and celebrates the disregarded heroes of the faith who knew their God and performed exceptional exploits.

However, the final two chapters that deal with the generation of stagnation and decline as well as spiritual weakness in High-Church places comprise the most painful writing experience. The manner in which the COGOP has responded to repeated calls for repentance has not only been eye opening but, more so, disappointing. The honest examination of these eras would be much too painful if not for the hope of contributing to a better understanding of church problems and possible solutions.

Methodology

The research for this dissertation incorporates primary and secondary resources comprised of letters of correspondence, archival data, interviews, denominational periodicals and reports, related scholarly works, and data from both the offices of the State and General Overseers of the church. The data compiled from the above-mentioned

sources is presented in charts, graphs, and anecdotal observations reflecting annual and generational membership and church statistical variations.

Adrian Varlack, Church Historian for the COGOP, offered unlimited access to the denominations historical archives in Cleveland, TN. Paul Holt, International Finance and Administration Executive Director and department secretary Sara Rising were extremely helpful with efforts to uncover needed historic files. The personal correspondences between the General Overseers (including A.J., M.A. Tomlinson, Billy Murray, and Fred Fisher) and former South Carolina State Overseers provided a wealth of information and insight into the times and events in which each was involved as did the cache of over 100 years of official denomination publications.

As with all such archival research, each information gate, when opened, revealed surprising new and previously unexplored passages. Church of God historian, David Roebuck serves as director of the Hal Bernard Dixon Jr. Pentecostal Research Center.[13] He guided my exploration into the birth of the Church of God in the late 19th and early 20th Century through the resources of the Consortium of Pentecostal Archives.[14] Lastly, State Overseer, Timothy Coalter permitted full access to South Carolina church data as office Administrator, Shirley Passmore, provided invaluable assistance in review of hundreds of ministerial files, reports, and correspondences.

Regarding Primary and Secondary Sources

[13] "Hal Bernard Dixon Jr. Pentecostal Research Center," Pentecostal Research Center, 2010, accessed October 14, 2012, http://www.cogheritage.org.
[14] *Consortium of Pentecostal Archives*, accessed October 8, 2012, https://pentecostalarchives.org/collections/.

This dissertation is based on letters of correspondence, interviews, ministerial reports, authoritative records, denominational publications, and the scholastic work of generations of historians. The correspondence is varied in source but includes letters from some of the major figures in the church in its formative years, specifically, A. J. Tomlinson, F.J. Lee, M.A., and Homer Tomlinson, as well as the preponderance of South Carolina Overseers from 1920 until present. Information otherwise unavailable was provided through interviews with ministers, historians, educators, current and former denominational leaders.

Authors and historians such as Vinson Synan,[15] Harold Hunter, Cecil M. Robeck,[16] R.G. Robins,[17] and Robert Mapes Anderson[18] have written extensively of the origins of the Holiness/Pentecostal movement and significant developments related to the Church of God and the Church of God of Prophecy. These churches began as one organization under the leadership of A.J. Tomlinson but a split over leadership resulted in two global Holiness/Pentecostal entities. Additionally, W.M. and Eufala Shepherd's biographical account of E.A. McDonald's landmark achievements as the principal pioneer of the Church in South Carolina provided insight heretofore unattainable.[19] These sources were invaluable in providing the historical foundation upon which the story was built.

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[15] Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Erdman's Publishing, 1971).
[16] Harold D. Hunter and Cecil M. Robeck, eds., *The Azusa Street Revival and Its Legacy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009, 2006).
[17] R. G. Robins, *A. J. Tomlinson: Plainfolk Modernist (Religion in America)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
[18] Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992).
[19] W.M. Shepard and Eufala Shepard, *My Adventures with God, Bishop E.A. Mcdonald, Sr.* (Greenville, SC: Southern Historical Press, Inc., 1997).

Layout of Chapters

Chapter One serves as an introduction to the Church of God[20] movement; its origins, and evolution. It outlines the development of the denomination both corporately, and more specifically, in South Carolina. It discloses the author's intended purpose for this dissertation and sets the boundaries limiting the research. The introduction explains how the author came to be interested in the subject matter, as well as offering illumination to his preexisting relationship with the Church. It also identifies the research methodology, sources used, and project layout.

Chapter Two tells of the origins of the over arching Church of God movement, tracing its roots from the New Testament foundation to the historic, "Arise, shine" of the "last days" church.[21] This chapter maps the course of church history from the Reformation, the Great Awakenings, through the advent of the Wesleyan Holiness associations that paved the way for the First Wave Pentecostal outpouring. Trailblazing luminaries such as R.G. Spurling, W.F. Bryant, and A.J. Tomlinson are introduced with an identification of the role each played in the church's conception.

Chapter Three recounts how the Church of God came to South Carolina. When the church, under Tomlinson's leadership, embraced and became part of the Pentecostal movement that was sweeping the southeastern US in the early 20th century, they exploded with remarkable growth. Church missionaries finally reached South Carolina in 1913. This chapter chronicles the infancy of the church in the Palmetto state and follows its growth during the next decade.

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[20] In all non-legal references, the COGOP has continually self-identified as the Church of God.
[21] The first General Overseer, A.J. Tomlinson, often referred to the date, June 13th, 1903 (the day that the Holiness Church at Camp Creek covenanted together as the Church of God of the Bible) as the fulfillment of Isaiah 60:1. See A J. Tomlinson, *The Church of God Movement Heritage Series*, vol. 1, *The Last Great Conflict* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing, 2011), 145.

Chapter Four covers the leadership battle between supporters of A.J. Tomlinson and F.J. Lee that culminated in a traumatic church split in 1923. Of those who remained aligned with Tomlinson, no state suffered losses equivalent to South Carolina. When Overseer J.W. Culpepper pledged his support to Lee, every pre-split church in the state followed him, leaving only a splattering of scattered support for Tomlinson.[22] The ensuing years, from 1923 to 1935, were the darkest and most depressing in modern church history. However, this chapter tells the story of long forgotten men and women who successfully kept an ember of hope glowing until the refreshing breeze of inspirational leadership emerged to stoke renewed flames of expansionism.

Chapter Five introduces a young and dynamic leader, E.A. McDonald, Sr. who provided inspirational and anointed leadership for 25 years.[23] During his tenure South Carolina experienced remarkable growth as the six fledgling churches he inherited in 1935 multiplied to a total of 85 by the end of his tenure. Also covered in this chapter are numerous accounts of the foot soldiers, the ministers and laity, who built the infrastructure of the Carolina church. Together they sowed the seed of revival, reaped an abundant harvest, while planting, and establishing new churches. The record of their sacrificial dedication is worthy of memorializing.

Chapter Six completes the saga of a generation of remarkable growth, chronicling McDonald's successors: L.V. Jones, Sr.; G.A. Wilson; and M.S. Curry. Under the leadership of these men the church in South Carolina reached all time statistical highs. This chapter concludes with an honor roll of the men and women who comprised the church's greatest generation.

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[22] Of the 25 South Carolina churches listed in 1922, none aligned with Tomlinson after the 1923 split.

[23] McDonald was only 29 years old when he arrived in SC in 1935 as a missionary Overseer.

Chapter Seven tells the gloriously inglorious story of the development of African-American churches and congregations in South Carolina. In reverse order, the inglorious portion of the saga reveals how lingering racism and existing Jim Crow laws facilitated the need for Black-only churches. However, the glorious counterpart is revealed in the manner in which the races united in order to fulfill the mandates of the Great Commission. Original Overseer, A.J. Tomlinson had historically embraced the equality of all men and thus, placed the Church of God at the forefront of the racially equality crusade. His example set the pace for the practice of ethnic inclusion at every level of church hierarchy.

Chapter Eight follows the COGOP as it slipped into a generation marked by stagnation and decline. This chapter addresses the trends, cultural influencers, historical processes, as well as the role that people, places and events played in the church's regression. From the high water mark registered in 1973, the next 37 years saw diminishing church rolls. However, of greater loss was the deteriorated attitude of respect for ordained leadership as well as denominational importance.

Chapter Nine closes this dissertation by reviewing the last 20 years of COGOP history, both in South Carolina and internationally. Statistical variances are examined in light of major doctrinal revisions made by the International church body. These revisions enabled the formation of splinter groups. Together these offshoot organizations offered refuge for a significant number of parishioners who had become disenchanted with the church's drift from traditionally conservative doctrinal positions. This chapter examines the effects these newly formed denominations had on South Carolina churches. Conversely, a more positive aspect of this historical drama is seen in the account of the

church's outreach efforts toward South Carolina's growing Hispanic population. After chronicling the events of the past two decades this chapter concludes by addressing the possibility of the rebirth of passion in the church.

Summary

This dissertation will examine the origin and history of the Church of God of Prophecy in South Carolina, giving special attention to the sense of purpose, and visionary leadership that, when present, fueled exponential growth. Beyond the historical value, it will attempt to identify and celebrate the spiritual passion present among the first generation pioneers that energized them to endure hardship and to escalate the work far beyond their resources. It will also offer insight into the times when the fires of passion began to wane while seeking to ascertain the associated reasons. It will seek to answer the question: Can the Church of God of Prophecy in South Carolina regain the passion, purpose, and vision that brought remarkable growth during the first half of the 20th century? It will focus on the tremendous achievements as well as the incredible setbacks that together comprise the heritage of three generations of parishioners. It is a chronicle of a remarkable people that has heretofore been untold and one that is long overdue.

CHAPTER 2. THE EARLY YEARS – THE REBIRTH OF A VISION 1880-1910

When you set yourself on fire, people love to come and see you burn.
–John Wesley

The origin of an apple is not seen by simply looking at the tree. The story begins in the warm, moist soil as a seed germinates, sprouts, shoots forth roots, then breaks the ground as a tender seedling. After some years, fragrant blossoms appear as a harbinger of the coming precious fruit. So, all growth is traced back to the original seed! When viewing the one small seed it is impossible to predict the future success. However, it is a certainty that without the seed there will be no fruit.

In much the same way, the origin of the Church of God of Prophecy in South Carolina can be traced through a seed planted by Jesus Christ in the mountains of Judah (Mt. Kurn Hattin) in the rich soil of the hearts of His twelve original Disciples.[1] Contained within the DNA of that seed would be generations of fruitful harvest, including the Last Day's Church of God. But, as Jesus Himself taught, unless the seed falls to the ground and dies, "it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24 KJV). Thus, the "planting of the Lord" (Isaiah 61:3 KJV) that was so full of life during the time and ministry of the first century church, disappeared for all practical purposes under the dusty stain of creeds, traditions of men, and apostasy to such an extent that the Church Jesus organized was unrecognizable and for all practical purposes

[1] The Church of God of Prophecy has traditionally identified the events of Matthew 16 that transpired on Mt. Kurn Hattin, probably A.D. 28 as the date Jesus set His church in order. This would make the COGOP Pre-Pentecost in origin. See C. T. Davidson, *Upon This Rock*, (Cleveland TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1973), 1:174.

completely obscured.[2]

However, in time, the seed of truth and divine revelation that lay dormant for generations began to germinate in the warm earth of the Great Reformation of Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and others. Further empowered by the energy of Evangelicals such as Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield in the First Great Awakening, fresh sprouts of holiness emerged, enlivened with Wesley's pursuit of Christian Perfection and Entire Sanctification. Nurtured by revivalists such as Charles G. Finney who watered the reformation seed transitioning the growth seasons of the First and Second Great Awakenings, tender shoots sprang up through the topsoil in landmark places like Cane Ridge. Soon thereafter, the white-hot activities of the post Civil-War Revival Camp Meetings further strengthened the tender plant.

Energized by the holiness preaching of spiritual radicals, sincere seekers pursued the truth of God through personal revelatory understandings of Scripture. As the Apostle Paul wrote, some plant, others water, but it is God who makes things grow (1 Cor. 3:6). The honor roll of men and women whom God used as husbandmen, working in His fields is too numerous to list. However, a shorter list (extremely limited) would include such luminaries as Finney, Phoebe Palmer, Timothy Merritt, Amanda Berry Smith,[3] A. B.

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[2] While recognizing the validity and importance of the Nicene Creed, Tomlinson, Spurling, et al., rejected the processes that allowed political leaders to become the influential force in the Church, thus giving birth to man-made creeds and extra-biblical articles of faith and 'cunning devised fables.' In his annual address to the Church in 1914 Tomlinson addressed this theme as he relating the fall of the Church of God from apostolic order. He said, "At that very moment it ceased to be the Church of God, for God's church has no creed" (*Echoes From The Tenth Annual Assembly of the Churches of God*, November 2-8, 1914, 13). Note: The Church of God and the Church of God of Prophecy publish books of minutes following each General Conference called Assemblies. These books also include policy manuals, business guides, church locations, list of ministers, and other current denominational documents.

[3] Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition* (Grand Rapids. MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 28. According to Synan, Amanda Smith was a freed slave, who received the second blessing in 1868 in Phoebe Palmer's meetings.

Simpson, and Benjamin Hardin Irwin (The Fire-Baptized Holiness Church).

Thus, before one sees the fruit of the tree, the figurative "apple" of the Last Day's Church of God, there was a myriad of events, places, and people that played into the germination, fertilization, hydration, and restorative process. Most notably was the transference or migration of the holiness movement from the Wesleyan/Methodist believers to a plethora of Holiness churches and associations.

The "First Wave" or Classical Pentecostal groups that surfaced immediately before the 20th century were birthed in the Holiness movement of the mid to late 1800s. One can only wonder what would have happened had the Methodist Church not abandoned and rejected the doctrines of Entire Sanctification and Christian Perfection that had long been a cornerstone of Methodism. But, as the end of the 19th century approached the ecclesiastical leadership within the Methodist Church began to systematically denounce the foundational principles of Wesleyan Holiness; expressly those doctrines related to 'sinless perfection' and 'entire, instantaneous sanctification.'

In July 1885 Atticus Green Haygood, a leading Georgia Methodist, was given the opportunity to preach at the Oxford district conference on the subject of sanctification. "Haygood chose the topic "Growth in Grace" and in his sermon denied the need for a "second blessing" of an instantaneous experience, calling instead for a gradual attainment of the sanctified state."[4] At the same time seminarians such as Wilbur F. Tillett of Vanderbilt University joined the crusade against the Wesleyan doctrines of complete

[4] Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition,* 37.

sanctification and holiness.[5] Among the intelligentsia, the concept of progressive sanctification was readily embraced and enthusiastically propagated to replace the traditional Wesleyan doctrine of instantaneous, entire sanctification. "To borrow an image that I believe Albert Outler first used, Christian Perfection, which was a cornerstone of Wesley's theology, had become by the twentieth century an annoying pebble in the shoe of American Methodism."[6]

Leaders within the Methodist Church used intellectual attacks, intimidation, and denominational segregation to divide and minimalize the old order traditionalist. According to Synan, "By the mid-nineties Methodist officials in the Southern church were assigning "holiness preachers" to "hard–Scrabble" circuits to lesson their influence. If a holiness pastor had been fairly successful in indoctrinating a congregation, his successor would be furnished with an "anti-holiness squad" and instructed to correct his predecessor's folly. In 1885 the North Georgia Conference assigned most of the "holiness" preachers to the Gainesville District, thereby hoping to localize the contagion."[7] When all else failed, if old-line ministers refuse to renounce their now radical views of holiness, tow-the-line, and measure up to the newly diminished standards of Methodism they were summarily 'called on the carpet' before leadership, and church boards. Some were even subjected to the trauma of "ecclesiastical litigations."[8]

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[5] In 1884 Tillett, called all varieties of the Holiness teaching "semi-Pelagian." See Harold Mann, *Atticus Greene Haygood, Methodist Bishop, Editor, and Educator* (Athens GA: University of Georgia Press, 1965), 161, accessed December 15, 2012, http://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/ugapressbks/pdfs/ugp9780820335438.pdf.

[6] Randy Maddox, "Holiness of Heart and Life: Lessons from North American Methodism," *Asbury Theological Journal* 51, no. 1 (1996): 163, accessed December 8, 2012, http://divinity.duke.edu/sites/default/files/documents/faculty-maddox/26_Holiness_of_Heart_Life.pdf.

[7] Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 39.

[8] Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 40.

Consistently, fewer and fewer church doors and pulpits were opened to the now outdated Methodist/holiness preachers. While many traditional Wesleyan clergy and laity resigned themselves to silently living out their lives and ministry within the church that was forsaking them, countless others were attracted to the new Holiness movements that were springing up. Disenfranchised groups of Methodists, Baptists, and others who were like-minded in their commitments to radical holiness formed loosely aligned Holiness associations, churches, and eventually denominations.[9]

Simultaneously, in the Great Smoky and Blue Ridge Mountain regions where Tennessee, Georgia, and North Carolina meet, a tinderbox of fresh kindling was gathering that would soon set the entire region ablaze. In this environment of religious enthusiasm and activism the East Tennessee Holiness Association was formed in the mid-1880s. Although its lifespan was rather brief, its significance is immeasurable. Based in and around Bradley County, TN it embodied much of the fervor that was endemic to the holiness movement. In their meetings, sanctification as a second definite work of grace was preached, not as an idealistic possibility, but as a biblical imperative for all who were saved by grace. However the demise of such groups was predetermined, not so much by their doctrinal positions, as by a lack of governmental structure, organization, and overindulgence in spiritual excesses and fanaticism.

The fermenting radicalism exemplified particularly by the Fire Baptized movement being developed by Benjamin Hardin Irwin was evinced also in the East TN Holiness Association. A. J. Lawson, former General Treasurer of the Church of God and

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[9] In October 1895, Phineas Bresee left the Methodist Episcopal Church. He and Dr. Joseph P. Widney, a Los Angeles physician and former president of the University of Southern California, joined with numerous laymen and women to form the Church of the Nazarene that would in time become the largest holiness church group in America. See Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition,* 41, 85.

contemporary of A. J. Tomlinson, was a participant and witnessed first hand these excesses. According to Lawson, "Some said they had "the baptism of fire" while others had received "dynamite" or "lyddite," the later of which allowed, or permitted them to walk the top of benches without criticism or question (for no one wanted to question the Lord). Some got what they called the "'Wheel-In-A Wheel' experience which they claimed delivered them from certain foods such as tomato soup, buttermilk, lard, etc."[10] With no governance to temper their actions, nor biblical foundation on which to stand, the proponents of these radical beliefs and practices would have to develop a means of self-moderation or else they would find themselves unable to stand under the weight of their own fanaticism; sinking deeper into muddy theology.

The problem of *enthusiasm* was nothing new. Every era of revival through modern history has had to deal with some specter of emotionalism manifested in radical beliefs and practices. Likewise, in every movement, fringes separated from the center, the dross burned off in the fire of introspection, while people of like mind and heart gravitated together forming doctrinal unions and denominational alliances.

Subsequently, in the mid-1880s R.G. Spurling, Jr, a licensed minister in the Missionary Baptist Church, living in Monroe County, Tennessee "became disturbed about certain traditions and creeds that he considered a hardship for God's people. He saw a need for further reformation of the church beyond the Great Reformation of the sixteenth century. While Luther, Calvin and other reformers had brought about important changes, their legacy focused on right belief rather than on a right relationship with Jesus

[10] Davidson, *Upon this Rock*, 290.

Christ and on assent to doctrine rather than love for one another."[11]

Spurling, a man of strong convictions was known to be a deep thinking and ardent student of the Bible. He believed that the New Testament was the only "infallible rule of faith and practice," thus, he suggested the rejection of "all other articles of faith and man-made creeds".[12] For Spurling, "the focus of Christianity was on the law of love rather than any creed or doctrine, which might be used to divide Christians. Where believers practice Christ's command to love God and neighbor, a testimony of faith in Christ is sufficient for unity with one another."[13] He proposed that it was essential that each individual Christian have the freedom and equal right "to read and understand and practice God's Word as they see it."[14]

Spurling spent over two years pleading with the Missionary Baptist church to consider necessary reforms. However, as church leaders remained opposed to his radical ideas, his only recourse was to look elsewhere. A conference was scheduled for "more careful consideration of religious matters."[15]

On Thursday, August 19, 1886, led by Spurling, a small group of sincere

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[11] David Roebuck, "Restorationism and a Vision for World Harvest: A Brief History of the Church of God (Cleveland, TN)," Dixon Pentecostal Research Center, accessed December 24, 2012, http://cogheritage.org/histories_of_cog/page/brief_history_of_the_church_of_god_by_david_roebuck_ph_d/.

[12] R. G. Spurling, *The Lost Link* (Turtletown, TN: self published, 1920), accessed December 24, 2012, http://cogheritage.org/original_documents/page/the_lost_link_by_r.g._spurling/. This desire for restoring the "primitive order' of the New Testament was a distinctly American religious idea. See: Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 82.

[13] David Roebuck, "Restorationism and a Vision for World Harvest: A Brief History of the Church of God (Cleveland, TN)," Dixon Pentecostal Research Center, accessed December 24, 2012, http://cogheritage.org/histories_of_cog/page/brief_history_of_the_church_of_god_by_david_roebuck_ph_d/.

[14] R. G. Spurling, *The Lost Link* (Turtletown, TN: self published, 1920), accessed December 24, 2012, http://cogheritage.org/original_documents/page/the_lost_link_by_r.g._spurling/.

[15] A. J. Tomlinson, *The Last Great Conflict* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1984), 137.

believers met at the Barney Creek meetinghouse in Monroe County, Tennessee. After energetic discussion highlighted by an impassioned plea from Spurling the group agreed to join together as a covenant partnership. "The proposition and obligation was simple . . .. "As many Christians as are here present that are desirous to be free from all man-made creeds and traditions, and are willing to take the New Testament, or law of Christ, for your only rule of faith and practice; giving each other equal rights and privilege to read and interpret for yourselves as your conscience may dictate, and are willing to set together as the Church of God to transact business as the same, come forward."[16] They chose to unite under the name of "Christian Union."

Even though Spurling's followers were sincere in their beliefs, over the next ten years they experienced little growth. However, soon events would transpire that would forever change not only Spurling's small circle, but in a significant way would become an integral part of a spiritual renewal movement that would have an explosive impact on the entire world over the next one hundred plus years.

William Martin, Joe M. Templeton, and Milton McNabb "were evangelists who left local Methodist and Baptist churches in the Coker Creek Community near the North Carolina border to join the fire baptize movement led by B. H. Irwin."[17] In 1896 these three, along with a Methodist preacher, Billy Martin, began to set the Unicoi Mountains ablaze with the message of the new fire baptism.[18]

Meeting in the Schearer schoolhouse they led a powerful revival, preaching the

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[16] Tomlinson, *The Last Great Conflict*, 137.
[17] Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 72.
[18] Harold Hunter, "'Beniah at the Apostolic Crossroads: Little Noticed Crosscurrents of B.H. Irwin, Charles Fox Parham, Frank Sandford, A.J. Tomlinson'," Cyberjournal For Pentecostal-Charismatic Research, accessed January 17, 2013, http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj1/hunter.html. Also, see Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 56.

doctrine of sanctification as the "second definite work of grace" to be received subsequent to justification. In this revival people who claimed to receive the experience of entire (instantaneous) Sanctification manifested many of the same emotions and uncontrollable gyrations reminiscent of the revivals of the First Great Awakening of Edwards' and Wesley's day.

Charles W. Conn wrote, "Almost from the start of the meeting, the altars were filled with repentant sinners and seekers for the experience of sanctification. Many skeptics of holiness were convinced, and many more rough-living sinners were converted."[19]

One of the respected religious personalities in the community was Will (W.F.) Bryant who had actively conducted Bible studies and worship services in his home. Caught up in the fervor of the revival, he vigorously sought the experience of entire sanctification.[20] Consequently, when the Shearer schoolhouse meetings ended, Bryant led avid seeks as they simply moved across the road to a log cabin where the revival continued unabated. However, "opponents of the sanctification message fought these meetings . . . Those who testified that they were sanctified suffered violent persecution. Their churches excluded them, and they were forced to meet in homes and makeshift, log houses of worship.[21] When the seekers would gather to worship, persecutors would

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[19] Charles W. Conn, *Like a Mighty Army: A History of the Church of God, 1886-1995*, definitive ed. (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1996), 24.

[20] Dr. Harold Hunter has established the connection between Bryant and B.H. Irwin's Fire Baptized Holiness Association. See: Harold Hunter, "*Beniah at the Apostolic Crossroads*," Cyberjournal For Pentecostal-Charismatic Research, accessed August 12, 2012, http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj1/hunter.html.

[21] David Roebuck, "*The Shearer Schoolhouse Revival*," Faith New Network, accessed January 17, 2013, http://www.faithnews.cc/?p=9661.

gather outside "shoot their guns, whooping, and yelling like wild men."[22]

Undaunted by this persecution, the "Saints" continue in their passionate pursuit of God. According to Tomlinson: "The people earnestly sought God and the interest increased until unexpectedly, like a cloud from a clear sky, the Holy Ghost began to fall on the honest, humble, sincere seekers after God. While the meetings were in progress, one after another fell under the power of God and soon quite a number were speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance."[23]

Leadership of this group fell on the shoulders of W. F. Bryant who opened the doors of his home as a house of worship. However, with no governance or local structure Bryant found it difficult to hold his fellow seekers together and protect them from emotional and doctrinal errors that continually arose. Of necessity he accepted the wise counsel of Spurling and on May 15, 1902 they organized the Holiness Church at Camp Creek in his home.[24] Spurling was chosen to be the pastor and Bryant was ordained into the ministry, which, he felt "made the church permanent."[25]

If Spurling was the "deep thinker," Bryant was the "backbone" of this newly organized group.[26] The Pentecostal manifestations and remarkable testimonies of divine healing that were becoming commonly associated with the infant Holiness Church further

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[22] W.F. Bryant, "History of Pentecost," *The Faithful Standard*, September, 1922, 6. Note: The Faithful Standard was a magazine published monthly by the Church of God Publishing House and edited by A.J. Tomlinson.
[23] Tomlinson, *The Last Great Conflict,* 140.
[24] Wade Phillips, "W. F. Bryant: From Bootlegger to Holiness Leader," *Church of God History and Heritage* 4, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2002): 3, accessed January 15, 2013, http://www.cogheritage.org/images/uploads/2002-summer_fall.pdf.
[25] *Book of Minutes General Assemblies, Church of God* (Cleveland, TN: Church of God Publishing House, 1922), 13. The Holiness Church at Camp Creek was organized with either sixteen or seventeen members. Tomlinson reflected in his annual address in 1928: "*the Church of God was built up from one church with sixteen members . . . to a membership of 21,076*" Historical Annual addresses, Vol. 2 (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1971),134.
[26] Identifiers used by Wade Phillips, "Our Rich Church of God Heritage: Born of the Spirit!," *Church of God History and Heritage* 1, no.1 (Summer 1997): 5.

infuriated the local Baptists and Methodists, heightening their antagonism against the Holiness movement. "Persecutions arose and four or five houses were burned where these earnest, humble people met for worship."[27]

Tomlinson recounts, "At one time the storm of persecution broke in with such fury that one hundred and six men, composed of Methodist and Baptist ministers, stewards and deacons, one justice of the peace and one sheriff, banded themselves together to put down the revival, even by violence, if that was the only way it could be accomplished. They deliberately tore down and burned the house, where sinners were getting saved in nearly every service, in open daylight. But the greater the persecution, the more the revival spread."[28]

As the harassments intensified, it was Bryant who refused to back down and served as the torchbearer to the infant Church. Once, while the church was meeting, "seven men banded themselves together to stop the work and one day rode to the home of Mr. Bryant and demanded him to stop the meetings and also forbid him to have prayers with his family; but like Daniel of old, he purposed in his heart to obey God rather than man and the meetings were continued, amid threats, showers of stones, and rains of lead."[29]

These devout men and women lovingly searched the Bible for complete truth and revelation, while modeling tremendous faith, boldness, Christian service, and sacrifice. Furthermore, they exemplified holiness in all areas of personal and public life. Nonetheless, the little Holiness group experienced little numerical growth in those early years partly due to being poorly organized and to a lack of funds.

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[27] Tomlinson, *The Last Great Conflict,* 140.
[28] Tomlinson, *The Last Great Conflict,140*-141.
[29] Tomlinson, *The Last Great Conflict,*141.

To this amalgamation of itinerant preachers and farmers came a powerful new leader in the personage of Ambrose Jessup Tomlinson. Identified by historian Vinson Synan as "a mystical Quaker from Indiana," his travels as a colporteur of the American Bible Society introduced him to key figures of the holiness revival at Camp Creek.[30]

Tomlinson (1865-1943) was one of the most influential and remarkable personalities in the American Holiness movement and even more significant in the progression of the First Wave Pentecostalism. He was a charismatic leader and visionary thinker who arrived in the North Carolina Mountains during the height of this holiness revival that punctuated the end of the 19th century and ushered in the 20th.

The Tomlinsons of Westfield, Indiana were Quakers by family tradition. However, A. J.'s parents (Milton and Delilah) were not particularly religious having been disowned from the Society of Friends Westfield Monthly Meeting for being wed in a non-church ceremony. By his own admission, raised in his family environment, Tomlinson knew nothing "about the bible or religion"[31] with the Bible "remaining little more than a family shrine, a neatly bound mausoleum whose leaves held the names of my dead brother and sisters."[32] However, shortly after marrying Mary Jane Taylor in 1889, Tomlinson began the spiritual journey that would ever become the very heartbeat of his existence. He penned his testimony in his 1913 booklet, *Answering the Call of God*:

> The first year of my married life I was one day engaged in hauling hay from one of those large Indiana meadows. A storm came up, and the men and myself hurried in to the barn with what hay we had on the wagons. I ran on to the house so Mary would not be by herself during the storm. It was a very severe storm, with much lightning and heavy thunder. Suddenly a heavier peal of thunder than usual sounded so as to almost deafen us. Wife suggested that the lightning had

[30] Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 74.
[31] A.J. Tomlinson, *Answering the Call of God* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, ca. 1913), 3.
[32] Robins, *A. J. Tomlinson, Plainfolk Modernist*, 71.

> struck the barn, but I said, "No, dear, it's the house." I saw the flash of lightning as it crashed down the chimney, out through the cook stove, and burst out through the ceiling and weatherboarding of the house only a few feet from where I was sitting. No serious damage was done, but it had an effect on me. That evening after supper I said to Wife, "It's time for us to pray," so I got the Bible someone had given her (up to that time I did not care anything about the Bible) and read a few verses, and down we went to prayer. No doubt I was very awkward, but I was sincere. I meant everything I said. Wife had been a Christian for some time, and could pray, but it was my first experience in that way. Nothing much was accomplished that night, but I never let up until I got a real experience of salvation.[33]

Never one to do things half-heartedly, after his conversion Tomlinson threw himself vigorously into the religious activities of the local Society of Friends Meetings. His natural inclination was to be involved in the Quaker mission works, even from the earliest days of his church association. This passion for missions and compulsion for the harvest of souls would become driving forces that would mark his life's work for the next 50 years.

At the same time, another life changing and deep-seated hunger would take root in the heart of Tomlinson. Influenced by the "holiness" preachers who stoked the fires of revival in central Indiana in 1891-92, Tomlinson became convinced of not only the need but of the real possibility of entire Sanctification.[34]

In 1913, Tomlinson related his sanctification experience, which had occurred two decades before.[35] R.G. Robins said the experience, "began with a "tremendous conflict" between his heaven bound soul and an "old man" (a common holiness metaphor for one's sinful nature). Like Jacob he wrestled with an adversary day and

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[33] Tomlinson, *Answering the Call of God*, 4-5.
[34] Robins, *A. J. Tomlinson, Plainfolk Modernist*, 110. The list of holiness preachers of that era includes: Jacob Baker, John Pennington, Emma Coffin, Jackson Morrow, and Nathan and Esther Frame.
[35] His account of his Sanctification event was recorded in his booklet: *Answering the Call of God.*

night, but unlike Jacob he did not initially prevail."[36] "How to conquer him," he confessed, "I did not know," and "nobody could tell me how or give me much encouragement."[37] Tomlinson was farming his corn crop, and said that he "prayed in nearly every row, and nearly all over the field."[38] Telling of the final victory in his own descriptive many, Tomlinson said, "It was a hand-to-hand fight, and the demons of hell seemed to be mustering their forces, and their ghastly forms and furious yells would no doubt have been too much for me had not the Lord of heaven sent a host of angels to assist me . . . But it was the last great conflict, and I managed, by some peculiar dexterity, to put the sword into him up to the hilt."[39] His sanctification came "like a thunderbolt from the skies, [as] a sensational power ended the conflict, and there lay the "old man" dead at my feet."[40]

After his Sanctification experience, Tomlinson can best be described as one who perpetually seeks after God and the people of God. Seekers find, the hungry are filled, and the thirsty are satisfied, thus, Tomlinson's exciting journey must have been charted by the master composer who orchestrated both harmonious and discorded encounters with men and events that would shape his life and gave impetus to a new move of God in the land.

Influenced greatly by J. B. Mitchell, a convert of Charles Finney who had devoted his life to "relief work and colportage among the poorest, most neglected people."[41] Tomlinson followed his lead. "Seeing great needs among the "mission field" in the

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[36] Robins, *A. J. Tomlinson, Plainfolk Modernist*, 109.
[37] A.J. Tomlinson, *Answering the Call of God*, 5.
[38] Tomlinson, *Answering the Call of God*, 5.
[39] Tomlinson, *Answering the Call of God*, 5.
[40] Tomlinson, *Answering the Call of God*, 6.
[41] Robins, *A. J. Tomlinson, Plainfolk Modernist*, 116.

mountains of western North Carolina, eastern Tennessee, and northern Georgia, Tomlinson traveled to that region as a Bible salesman for the American Bible Society and the American Tract Society in 1896"[42]

As Tomlinson traveled on mission journeys with Mitchell, they visited impoverished communities included Culberson, North Carolina, (where Tomlinson and Mitchell established a Christian school and orphanage in 1899),[43] and Camp Creek, North Carolina where Tomlinson first met "Richard Spurling, Jr., Frank Porter and W.F. Bryant, [who had] organized as the "Holiness Church at Camp Creek."[44]

The seeker moved about the countryside with remarkable efficiency considering the transportation options of the times. He traveled through at least eighteen states in a matter of months – always searching for people and opportunities that would bring him closer to the truths of God. How he got acquainted with Frank Sanford and his holiness training center called Shiloh near Durham, ME is unclear. However, it does appear that the dynamic Sanford with his transfixing personality had a great influence on Tomlinson's "later views on eschatology" and ecclesiology.[45] Although lesser-known than some of his contemporaries the influence and importance of Frank Sanford should not be underestimated. Besides his encounters with Tomlinson, Sanford also had similar meetings with Charles Parham, one of the most respected and influential names of the

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[42] David Roebuck, "Restorationism and a Vision for World Harvest: A Brief History of the Church of God (Cleveland, TN)," Dixon Pentecostal Research Center, accessed December 24, 2012, http://cogheritage.org/index.php/histories_of_cog/page/brief_history_of_the_church_of_god_by_david_roebuck_ph_d/.

[43] See Robins, *A. J. Tomlinson, Plainfolk Modernist*, 129-131.

[44] Ed van der Maas, *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements.*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 1144.

[45] Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 75

First Wave Pentecostal movement.[46]

Sanford delivered a sermon on May 2, 1897 in Auburn, Maine entitled "The Church" in which he identified the distinguishing marks for the true church: "First, that church possesses right authority: the power to "bind and loose" exercised under the oversight of a divinely appointed apostle.[47] Second, it possessed "right order," being constituted of those and only those who have been properly baptized "by the Spirit of Christ." Third, it possessed a proper name . . . any true church would select its name from the divinely sanctioned options found in the New Testament (Sanford preferred "the church of God" and "the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth").[48]

During the 1890s, Tomlinson must have felt as though he was all of the assorted objects flittering in and out of the hands of a masterful juggler. The circus that had become his life consisted of a myriad of places (Indiana, Appalachia, Maine), an eclectic blend of ministry assignments, (colportage, Bible School, revival preaching, mission work, and an orphanage) as well as a multiplicity of divinely appointed meetings with spiritual giants such as like "A. B. Simpson, Martin Wells, Seth C. Rees, G. D. Watson, B. H. Irwin, and Frank W. Sanford."[49] However, if God was indeed the one running the show, then all of these events, places, positions, and encounters were handled divinely by the Master juggler with a perfect sense of timing, precision, purpose, and destiny. If indeed God was working His plan, He was also preparing His man.

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[46] James R. Goff Jr. and Grant Wacker, eds., *Portraits of a Generation: Early Pentecostal Leaders* (Fayetteville AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2002), 50.
[47] Published in Sandford's periodical, *Tongues of Fire* (June 1, 1897), 90 - 94; and *Tongues of Fire* (April 1, 1898), 51-56.
[48] Robins, *A. J. Tomlinson, Plainfolk Modernist*, 123.
[49] Wade H. Phillips, "Our Rich Church of God Heritage: Born of the Spirit!" *Church of God History and Heritage*, 1:1, (Summer, 1997), 1, accessed December 13, 2012, http://www.cogheritage.org/images/uploads/1997-summer.pdf.

During his itinerate mountain ministry, "Tomlinson met W. F. Bryant after selling five-cent New Testaments to Bryant's young boys. The boys suggested that he meet their "powerful religious" father, and Tomlinson became acquainted with the holiness work at Camp Creek."[50]

Through Bryant, Tomlinson met the spiritually insightful R. G. Spurling. Years later, when introducing Spurling to preach in the 1913 General Assembly, Tomlinson said:

> I was searching for the truth. I knew there must be some plan yet undiscovered for the government of God's people. It was in God's providence that I met brother Spurling who explained to me his vision of God's church as he saw it in the Word. He showed me that we were received into the church by covenant with each other to obey the laws of Christ. In one sense I looked upon him as my father.[51]

It is unclear if the triumvirate of Spurling, Bryant, and Tomlinson fully appreciated what the young seedling they were cultivating in the Unicoi Mountains would eventually become. However the power of 'three' was clearly achieved in this union. These men offered the infant Holiness Church the stability of a three-legged stool and the strength of a "threefold cord" (Eccles. 4:12b KJV).

For Tomlinson, this was a welcomed respite from his immediate pilgrimage. He said, "I had . . . searched and investigated many movements until my faith in them had completely exhausted. I seemed to be like a ship at sea with no rudder by which it should be controlled."[52] Accordingly, David Roebuck said, "In R. G. Spurling, Tomlinson found a spiritual father and mentor. In W. F. Bryant, he found a brother and companion in

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[50] David Roebuck, "Restorationism and a Vision for World Harvest: A Brief History of the Church of God," Church of God, September, 1997, accessed December 16, 2012, http://www.churchofgod.org/heritage/Restorationism.pdf.
[51] *Echoes From The Tenth Annual Assembly of the Churches of God*, January 7-12, 1913, 38.
[52] Tomlinson, *Answering the Call of God*, 17.

ministry, and in the people of the Holiness Church at Camp Creek, he found a home and a congregation that deeply wanted to please God and restore the New Testament church of God."[53]

Although originally reluctant to join an organized/structured church, by June of 1903, after a brief return to Indiana, Tomlinson met with Spurling and Bryant and questioned them "severely and at length on the order and biblical basis of their new church. Early the next morning June 13, 1903, A. J. ascended the mountain behind Bryant's humble cabin. There, in nature's own cathedral – the "fields of the wood" prophesied by David in Psalm 132:6 – he "prayed and prevailed" for divine guidance. The answer dawned bright like an Appalachian morning: "Arise and shine; for the light has come," he heard the Lord say, and so he returned to join what he now knew to be "the Church of God of the Bible."[54]

Years later Tomlinson would tell the story in his own words:

> I came back down the mountain and entered the meeting. Questions were asked, Bible answers were given. They said they took the whole Bible rightly divided as their only rule of faith and practice. I said, 'Well if you take the whole Bible rightly divided, that makes it the Church of God. Why do you want to call it the Holiness Church at Camp Creek?' They agreed with me but couldn't answer my question. Then I said, 'You have agreed that this that I have said makes it the Church of God, and will you be willing to take it and keep it the Church of God?' They said they were willing. I then asked if they were willing to take me and with the understanding that it IS the Church of God – not going to be, but IS the Church of God? They were willing. So I stood right there in front of the fireplace and brother Spurling . . . took the Bible and gave it to me. He handed it to me and said, 'Will you take this as the Word of God, believe it and practice it, obey its precepts and walk in the light as God is in the light?' I thought deeply. I remembered what time I had on the mountain. I meant business. God meant business . . . Right here I gave my hand to brother Spurling . . . I took the obligation with deep sincerity and extreme sacredness never to be forgotten.[55]

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[53] Roebuck, *Book Title*, page number.
[54] Robins, *A. J. Tomlinson, Plainfolk Modernist*, 168.
[55] C. T. Davidson, *Upon This Rock*, 1:314-15 (Cleveland TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1973), quoted from "*A. J. Tomlinson—Prophet of Wisdom.*"

Tomlinson was chosen to pastor the newly named Church of God and it's approximate 20 members. Under his dynamic leadership the church that had been numerically stagnant began to experience growth. Bryant and Spurling were commissioned to do evangelistic work. Within the year new churches were organized in in Georgia and Tennessee.

By the end of 1905 "the work had so prospered that there began to be a demand for a general gathering together of members from all the churches to consider questions of importance and to search the Bible for additional light and knowledge. Accordingly, arrangements were made and the meeting called."[56]

On January 26 and 27, 1906 twenty-one delegates gathered in the home of J.C. and Melissa Murphy in Camp Creek, North Carolina. Undaunted by bone chilling winds and a record setting blizzard, delegates came from churches in Dry Gulch and Union Grove, Tennessee, Jones, Georgia, and the local Camp Creek congregation.

"The importance of that first Assembly cannot be underestimated. It was a significant first step away from congregational church government and toward a centralized model. Particularly important was the precedent they set for decision-making. They searched the Scriptures and sought the will of God. They allowed issues to be debated and different voices to be heard. They believed that they had biblical examples for what they were accomplishing and they saw themselves as following the model of the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15."[57]

The intent and initial motivation of those early pioneers is revealed in the opening statements of the first Assembly minutes:

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[56] Tomlinson, "The Last Great Conflict," 142.
[57] "Our First General Assembly," (online video clip), accessed January 09, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oAuR_6smO0Q.

> We hope and trust that no person or body of people will ever use these minutes, or any part of them, as articles of faith upon which to establish a sect or denomination. The subjects were discussed merely to obtain light and understanding. Our articles of faith are inspired and given to us by the Holy Apostles written in the New Testament, which is our only rule of faith and practice.[58]

Tomlinson, the host pastor, had called the meeting to order and served as the moderator. After some discussion they concluded, "We do not consider ourselves a legislative or executive body, but judicial only."[59]

Items discussed and deemed important in that first General Assembly as recorded in the official Minutes: the necessary of Worship; an emphasis on prayer meetings, family worship and Sunday Schools, and a recognition of the importance of living a holy life.

However, the deep seeded conviction and heartbeat of those early Church of God pioneers is revealed in the historical hand written record of a general discussion on the subject of Evangelism: "After the consideration of the ripened fields and open doors for evangelism this year, strong men wept and said they were not only willing, but really anxious to go. It is, therefore, the sense of this meeting that we do our best to press into every open door this year and work with greater zeal and energy for the spread of the glorious gospel of the Son of God than ever before."[60] These were men and who had endured life-threatening persecutions, and even now were braving a treacherous snowstorm. However, what broke their hearts and drove them to their knees; what made 'strong men weep' was the understanding that without Christ's redeeming blood, men and women would lose their eternal souls, dying lost, forever estranged from Christ.

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[58] Minutes of the Annual Assembly of the Churches of East Tennessee, North Georgia and Western North Carolina, January 26 & 27, 1906, at Camp Creek, NC, 1.
[59] Minutes, January 26 & 27, 1906, Churches of East Tennessee , 1.
[60] Minutes, January 26 & 27, 1906, Churches of East Tennessee , 1.

"Strong men wept!"

In November 1904 Tomlinson recorded in his journal, "I am arranging to move to Cleveland, Tennessee, and take charge of churches at Drygo and Union Grove and mission work in Cleveland."[61] In December he relocated his family and ministry. The move from the backwoods of North Carolina to the larger, more industrialized town of Cleveland would allow Tomlinson greater access to public transportation, better roads, new communication opportunities, improved education for his children, access to additional goods and services, as well as a larger population base from which to build his own local church. However, it would have been impossible to visualize the total affect that such a move would have on Cleveland and the surrounding communities. Over the next 100-plus years the Church of God, the Church of God of Prophecy, as well as other offshoot organizations that sprang from those two primary groups would make Cleveland their International Headquarters, building massive office complexes, headquartered churches, Lee University, Tomlinson College, orphanages, and Publishing Houses. The religious, economic, and social effects go far beyond measurable limits.

Indeed, Tomlinson was the right man, at the right place, at the right time. The infusion of vision, leadership, and limitless zeal Tomlinson brought to the Holiness Church at Camp Creek, dramatically changed the small, isolated group that had been caringly nurtured by Spurling and Bryant. Lamar Vest, former General Overseer of the Church of God, said, "If it wasn't for A. J. Tomlinson and for A. J. Tomlinson's vision, and his insistence of getting those folks out of those mountains and moving into

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[61] Harold D. Hunter and Cecil M., Jr. Robeck, eds., *The Azusa Street Revival and Its Legacy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009), 115.

Cleveland TN, we would have been a very small, dying movement back in the mountains."[62]

Even though the Holiness Church at Camp Creek had agreed in June of 1903 that they would *function* as the Church of God of the Bible, the continuation or, rather, restoration of the early church founded by Christ in the New Testament, it was not until the Second General Assembly held at Union Grove, Tennessee that the Church moved officially to accept the name of the "Church of God." The Minutes simply stated: "Decision was made harmoniously. "Church of God." 1 Cor. 1:2 2 Cor. 1:1."[63]

With a sense of eternal destiny, under Tomlinson's leadership the Church experienced remarkable growth, beyond most reasonable expectations. From the original gather of four infant churches meeting 1906 for the first Assembly, there was exponential growth, insomuch that by the end of 1910 there were 58 Churches, with 107 Licensed Ministers, and 1855 total members.[64]

While few could envision such expansion, it did not take Tomlinson by surprise. Actually, he may have been disappointed that growth did not meet his expectations. He believed that when the Church fully modeled the correct New Testament order they would experience the same remarkable growth that was experienced by the first century church after Pentecost. He wrote: "With a threshing machine in perfect operation; with its cylinder, windmill, screens, etc., each part performing its function or duty and the sheaves of wheat thrust into its mouth by the feeder, the beautiful grain will appear in its

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[62] Fred S. Fisher, Interview by author, Lancaster, SC, August 23, 2012. Bishop Fisher, former General Overseer of the Church of God of Prophecy, reported the conversation he had with Former Church of God General Overseer, Lamar Vest in which Bishop Vest praised the leadership and vision of A.J. Tomlinson.

[63] Second General Assembly, January 9-13, 1907, Union Grove, (Bradley County), Tennessee, 22.

[64] Davidson, *Upon This Rock*, 1:378.

proper place ready for the garner. So when the Church gets in perfect order as it was in apostolic days, the Gospel will go forth and souls' by the multitudes will be gathered in."[65]

Among the factors contributing to the rapid growth of the Church were: revival passion, as they were fanatical about calling men and women to turn from their sins and turn to God; preaching the doctrine of entire Sanctification as a second definite work of grace that enables true holiness in the heart, mind, spirit and body; preaching and practicing divine healing while encouraging full trust in God to meet every physical need; and the complete belief that they were in fact the restoration of the first century Church of God that Jesus organized and that the Apostles cherished and built. As they feverously sought after God's presence, favor, and help, extended sessions of spiritual ecstasy would encompass entire congregations, rapturing their hearts with love, joy, humility, and a desire for more of the same. Consequently, it was not uncommon for church services to continue past midnight as hungry saints sought a closer walk and deeper experience with God while penitent sinners cried out for forgiveness and redemption.

As the commanding general over his volunteer army, Tomlinson led the growing company of reapers into the harvest fields. He wrote, "My soul is all aflame, . . . with His love for this lost world as I write at this midnight hour after spending the day in His service. Sleep has gone from me. Souls are dropping into hell at the rate of 3,600 every hour—86,400 every day, how can any one sleep?"[66]

As of 1907 the Church of God was still primarily a holiness Church. While many members and ministers had received the experience of Pentecost, it was as yet only a

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[65] Tomlinson, *The Last Great Conflict*, 31.
[66] Tomlinson, *The Last Great Conflict*, 30.

cherished dream for Tomlinson. At Frank Sanford's Shiloh (ME) and in the Holiness Church at Camp Creek, (NC) he had likely been exposed to those who experienced the Spiritual manifestation of "speaking in tongues" as well as countless other "signs and wonders" but up until then these experiences were accepted as "second blessing" expressions or divine encounters "in which the seeker achieved victory over sin and an enduement of Pentecostal power in the same instant."[67] The identifying of the Pentecostal experience as a separate, independent blessing (or third blessing) had only recently become associated with receiving the Holy Ghost baptism.[68] Sadly, while others were experiencing the power of Pentecost, Tomlinson was an outsider, looking in.

By January of 1907 he became more "fully awakened on the subject of receiving the Holy Ghost as He was poured out on the day of Pentecost."[69] But, as had been his history, spiritual experiences, thought coming to him in a deeply significant manner, seldom came easy. It had taken a near tragic encounter with a bolt of lightning to open his heart to Salvation, and his experience of entire Sanctification was a life and death battle, much like Jacob's wrestling match recorded in Genesis 32. While others may have received the Holy Spirit baptism upon first hearing the message, for Tomlinson it would require much research, prayer, and seeking. He later wrote, "By the close of the year, I was so hungry for the Holy Ghost that I scarcely cared for food, friendship, or anything else. I wanted the one thing—the baptism with the Holy Ghost."[70]

The seamless continuum of leaders, revivals, manifestations and reports of

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[67] Vinson Synan, "Pentecostal Roots," in *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal, 1901-2001,* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 32.
[68] Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 89. Charles F. Parham first associated "glossolalia" (speaking in tongues) as not only the initial evidence, but the only evidence of receiving the Baptism of the Holy Ghost.
[69] Tomlinson, *The Last Great Conflict*, 154.
[70] Tomlinson, *The Last Great Conflict*, 154.

meaningful events transpiring around the turn of the century were knit together to give not only historical record, but witness that what was happening was not mere happenstance or accident – this moving of the Holy Spirit had to have been heaven sent and God-ordained.[71]

An oft-used illustration tells of an atheist harassing a Sunday school boy. "Hey, Sonny, show me where God is and I'll give you an apple," he said. To which the boy replied, "Mister, show me where God ain't and I'll give you a bushel of apples!" Even so, it is difficult to find a period of history in which there were not reports of glossolalia.[72] However, the immediate linage that influenced Tomlinson can be traced from Charles Fox Parham's Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas (January 1, 1901), through William Seymour's Azusa Street Revival (1906), and through Mack M. Pinson, and G. B. Cashwell (1907).

Cashwell, a preacher of the Pentecostal Holiness Church of North Carolina, read about the Azusa Street Revival and traveled to Los Angeles in 1907 to see it for himself. While there he "received the baptism of the Holy Spirit when several young African-American boys prayed him for".[73] Upon returning to North Carolina Cashwell became the burning fire of Pentecostalism as the same manifestation of the Spirit baptism were evident in his revival meetings as were reported at Azusa St. Later, Cashwell joined M.

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[71] While Tomlinson had most likely seen and heard examples of glossolalia (*speaking in tongues*) in the Unicoi Mountains associated with the Shearer schoolhouse revival, the holiness Church Camp Creek, and possibly while visiting with Frank Sanford and Shiloh, Maine, he would associate his understanding of the development of the Pentecostal experience with Williams Seymour's Azusa Street revival in California. See: Tomlinson, "The Last Great Conflict", 105.
[72] See: Vinson Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal,* 18-37. Also: John Sherrill, *They Speak with Other Tongues*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2004), and, Morton T. Kelsey, *Tongue Speaking: the History and Meaning of Charismatic Experience* (Waukesha, WI: Crossroad Pub Co, 1981).
[73] Vinson Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal,* 66.

M. Pinson in conducting a revival in Birmingham where many received the Pentecostal experience including H. G. Rodgers and Pinson. These two would later form a cooperative association of Pentecostal ministers, which evolved into the Assembly of God denomination.[74]

Tomlinson, with his close friend M. S. Lemons, visited the Birmingham revival in June 1907. Pinson noted simply, "I remember that Tomlinson from Cleveland, Tennessee, and I believe a brother named lemons came to my meeting there. . . . They didn't stay long."[75] However, Tomlinson recorded a more animated account in his diary on June 14, 1907: "Returned home today from Birmingham, Alabama, where I have been for a week in a meeting with brother M. M. Pinson. Glorious results. Speaking in other tongues by the Holy Ghost."[76] Tomlinson sought for the Baptism of the Spirit while in Birmingham, but without success.

More determined than ever to experience Pentecost, Tomlinson invited Cashwell to preach in the eighth General Assembly meeting in Cleveland, TN. It was on Sunday, January 12, 1908 that Tomlinson received the experience he had been craving:

> "While he was preaching a peculiar sensation took hold of me and almost unconsciously I slipped off my chair in a heap on the rostrum at Brother Cashwell's feet. I did not know what such an experience meant. My mind was clear, but a peculiar power so enveloped and thrilled my whole being that I concluded to yield myself up to God and await results. I was soon lost to my surroundings . . . Soon one of my feet began to shake and clatter against the wall. I could not hold it still. When it got quiet the other one acted the same way. Then my arms and head were operated . . .
> My body was rolled and tossed about beyond my control and . . . my tongue

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[74] Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 123

[75] Mack M. Pinson, *Sketches of the Life and Ministry of Mack M. Pinson* (Dixon Pentecostal Research Ctr., Cleveland, TN: Unpublished, 1949), 10, quoted in Harold D. Hunter and Cecil M., Jr. Robeck, eds., *The Azusa Street Revival and Its Legacy*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 121.

[76] *Diary of A. J. Tomlinson 1901-1924: The Church of God Heritage Series* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2012), 67.

> would stick out of my mouth in spite of my efforts to keep it inside my mouth . . . As I lay there great joy flooded my soul. The happiest moments I had ever known up to that time. I never knew what real joy was before. My hands clasped together with no effort on my part. Oh, such floods and billows of glory ran through my whole being for several minutes! . . .
> Then came a very interesting part of the experience . . . In vision I was carried to Central America, and was shown the awful condition of the people there . . . Then I spoke in tongues as the Spirit gave utterance and in the vision I seemed to be speaking the very same language of the Indian tribes with whom I was surrounded.[77]

In his trance like state, Tomlinson "traveled to many areas of the world including all of the inhabited continent. In his vision, Tomlinson believed that his tongues speech was in fact the languages of the native peoples of the countries he was visiting."[78]

Tomlinson described his experience, "It seemed that the Spirit was showing me these countries with a view to sending me there. Each place I saw large numbers of people coming to the light. I saw multitudes coming to Jesus. I do not know whether God wants me to go to these places or not, but I am certainly willing to go as He leads."[79]

After this, reports of signs and wonders in Church services were more the rule than the exception. Tomlinson testified, "Three times during special manifestations of His presence, truthful witnesses have seen "like as of fire" resting near and around my head." And, "one time, as I stepped out to make an altar call, as I lifted my hands, a kind of blue mist was seen by a number of truthful witnesses as it settled down on the congregation and not a few fell and either crawled or were carried into the altar." "Streaks of fire have been seen as they darted just above the heads of the people in the congregation, like zigzag lightning, and yet not so quick but that it was easily seen by

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[77] Tomlinson, "The Last Great Conflict,"154-5.
[78] Harold D. Hunter and Cecil M., Jr. Robeck, eds., *The Azusa Street Revival and Its Legacy,* 125.
[79] Tomlinson, "The Last Great Conflict," 156.

scores of people."[80]

Then on "January 3, 1909, while God's power was being so wonderfully demonstrated on the inside of the house, a large ball of fire was seen to pass just in front of the door of the church house. A sign of a peculiar character was seen in the heavens about the same time. The same night, or at another time at the same place, there was seen a ball of fire descend from above and as it struck the roof of the house just above the pulpit and altar, where so much of God's presence was being demonstrated, it broke into fragments and rolled and sparkled over the roof."[81]

In a real sense, with Tomlinson's Holy Ghost baptism, the Church of God became a Holiness/Pentecostal denomination as the power of Pentecost became co-equal with Holiness as the distinctive identifiers of the Church of God movement. In doctrine the Church was Holiness; in practice and function, Pentecostal.

With a Wesleyan/holiness tradition, a belief in three definite Spiritual experiences (Salvation, entire Sanctification, and the Baptism of the Holy Ghost) a strong confidence in Divine healing for all, and an over-riding conviction that they were, in fact, the restoration of the New Testament Church of God, the church grew exponentially. The 20 or so members who on June 13, 1903 covenanted together to be the Church of God would, within 20 years, bear fruit 1000% (21,076).[82] During the same time, the one local church in the Unicoi Mountains grew to 666 congregations in the U.S, Bahamas Islands, China, and Jamaica.

It was "under the dynamic leadership of the . . . spirit-baptized Tomlinson, the Church of God grew rapidly, planting or absorbing congregations . . . By the early 1930s

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[80] Tomlinson, *The Last Great Conflict*, 156.
[81] Tomlinson, *The Last Great Conflict*, 157.
[82] *Minutes*, January 26 & 27, 1906, Churches of East Tennessee, 56.

the Church of God was a second largest Pentecostal communion."[83] However, the road of global influence would not travel down "easy street." Future successes would come at tremendous costs.

[83] Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherit: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 115-16.

CHAPTER 3. THE CHURCH OF GOD IN SOUTH CAROLINA – SMALL BEGINNINGS

Like a mighty army moves the church of God;
Brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod.[1]

-Sabine Baring Gould

If the Church of God embedded its roots in the Wesleyan doctrine of Sanctified Holiness, it found its wings in the First Wave Pentecostal movement. Even though some ministers had testified of receiving the baptism of the Holy Ghost before G.B. Cashwell's arrival in Cleveland, TN on January 10th, 1908, it was when A. J. Tomlinson received the experience two days later that the Church of God became fully both a Holiness and Pentecostal denomination. In like manner as in the First Century when the New Testament Church received the *dynamis* (power) on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:8 KJV), the Church of God exploded with its newly acquired Pentecostal power.

Before 1910 there were no accurate membership records kept. However, historical data shows that when the Fourth Annual Assembly met on January 6, 1909 the Church of God consisted of 12 congregations.[2] But, when the rushing, mighty wind of Pentecost fanned revival fires the church experienced exponential growth. One year later when the fifth General Assembly met (January 10-16, 1910) the churches multiplied 2½ times, as "there were 22 ordained ministers and 20 licensed ministers representing 31

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[1] Sabine Gould, "*Onward, Christian Soldiers*" in Banner Hymnals (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1957), 372.
[2] Charles W. Conn, *Like a Mighty Army: A History of the Church of God, 1886-1995*, (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1996), 109.

churches and 1005 members."[3] Continuing this remarkable growth pattern, by the end of that year (1910), membership increased 85%, from 1005 to 1,855 as did the number of local churches, from thirty-one to fifty-eight.[4] Thus, in less than two years (1909-11) the number of Church of God congregations increased from 12 to 58, almost a 400% growth rate!

Also, in 1910 "the church began its first official publication, named *The Evening Light and Church of God Evangel.*[5] Through this weekly newspaper members could read local and cooperate church news articles, notices, and announcements, as well as sermons and instructions from the General Overseer and his staff. However, what probably garnered the most excitement were the reports steadily coming from the field of miracles, supernatural manifestations, and vibrant revivals.

Under the heading "Preachers Behind the Bars Shouting and Praising God," J. W. Buckalew reported to the *Evangel* of a "Great Meeting at Alabama City, Ala."[6] He gave an account of a tent revival held in August or September (1910) in which thousands of people gathered in and around the canvas sanctuary. The number of souls saved was so large they could not keep track. On some nights "over 100 hungry souls would make a rush to the altar and go to crying through to God."[7]

He then describes the persecution that was commonly heaped on such evangelist: "many times the Devil's crowd invited us to leave the town, or they would burn the tent;

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[3] Conn, *Like a Mighty Army*, 117.
[4] Conn, *Like a Mighty Army*, 121.
[5] Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 79.
[6] John W. Buckalew "Great Meeting at Alabama City, Ala: Preachers Behind the Bars Shouting and Praising God," *Evening Light and Church of God Evangel*, October 15, 1910, 6. Note *The Evening Light* and *Church of God Evangel* was a weekly magazine published as the written voice of the Churches of God, Cleveland, TN.
[7] Buckalew, "Great Meeting at Alabama City, Ala," 6.

but wife and I and a few faithful young men stayed and guarded the tent and defeated their plans until the board of Aldermen and Mayor of the city wrote to Cleveland, Tenn., to find out how they got rid of the "Holiness People." The answer stated that they just put them in jail and burned their tent."

Such threats and railings fell on deaf ears because Buckalew was no soft handed, weak spine evangelist. God will often take the roughest sinner, clean him up, fill him up, and then set him up in the pulpit. "Buckalew had been a gambler and drunkard before his conversion, a fugitive from the law, an unstable husband and father who, from his home in Trion, Georgia, wandered into Alabama, where he came under the influence of the holiness message[8]." As tough as nails, as tempered hard as steel, he became "one of the most effective evangelist in Pentecostal history."[9]

Near mid-night one Friday night, drunken police officers arrested Buckalew and some of his co-workers and took them to jail. But the local jail became a house of worship, for as soon as the cell door closed behind them, they, "began to shout. All night long we prayed and sang and shouted. Immediately they [detractors] left the jail and returned to the tent, cut it down and set fire to it."[10]

Buckalew continued, "Morning dawns; the sun with its golden rays peeps from behind the eastern horizon and find its way down upon a stone jail. The people begin to arise. Hush, Listen, is exclaimed and they hear the shouting and singing . . . A crowd begins to gather outside . . . at eight o'clock we sang, Jesus Passed this way before. Then we called them to prayer. Such a sight I never saw before." That morning, peering through the jailhouse bars the rugged evangelist saw, "Men and women . . . on their faces

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[8] Conn, *Like a Mighty Army*, 125
[9] Conn, *Like a Mighty Army*, 125
[10] Buckalew, "Great Meeting at Alabama City, Ala," 6.

or under the power of God."[11] Unable to dissuade the crowd that was growing larger, the officials released the preachers who, against direct orders to not do so, proceeded to patch up the remnants of their tent and continued the revival. That night, as over 2,000 people gathered around the charred remains of their tent, Buckalew preached his text, "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word" (Acts 4:29 KJV). There, among the ashes, another Church of God was organized.

Such reports of magnificent revivals and the accompanying persecutions became familiar themes that typified a rapid growth pattern. By 1913 church membership ballooned to 3,116.[12] At the same time, mission zeal flourished as workers traveled to the Bahamas (1909),[13] and Cuba (1910),[14] while others planted churches in Kentucky (1910), Illinois and New Mexico (1912), Mississippi, West Virginia, Colorado, and California (1913). Furthermore, in 1913 the first African-American churches were organized in Jacksonville and Miami, Florida.[15]

Singer/song writer, Carmen Licciardello captured in lyrical form the heartbeat of those early Pentecostal pioneers: "The world may try and stop my mission, but I grow with opposition – Cause I'm a Bible toting, scripture quoting, sin defacing, devil chasing, Chorus humming, guitar strumming, gospel preaching, soul reaching overcoming child of God."[16] An honor roll of revival preaching, persecution enduring, church planting

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[11] Buckalew, "Great Meeting at Alabama City, Ala," 6.
[12] Conn, *Like a Mighty Army,* 580.
[13] Conn, *Like a Mighty Army*, 150.
[14] Conn, *Like a Mighty Army*, 124.
[15] Conn, *Like a Mighty Army*, xviii
[16] Licciardello, Carmelo Domenic, "Overcoming Child," N.p.: Sony, 1990. Audio Cassette.

pioneers would include J.W. Buckalew, Sam Perry, J.B. Ellis, M.S. Lemons, Efford Haynes, and E.J. Boehmer.

Hardship was their constant companion. With no salary or dependable compensation, they "trusted the Lord" for every material, physical, and spiritual need. Opponents who were determined to do away with the holiness doctrine and the associated Pentecostal exuberance resorted to pelting the evangelist and their teams with insults, profanities, eggs, and stones; sometimes firing guns at their meeting places. However, "fire was the weapon of choice in many places." Fred Chambers, a mission worker in the NC Mountains in 1911 said, "the cabin where the workers stayed was burned down and the arsonist prevented the workers from salvaging their possessions. They moved from place to place and lived like paupers."[17]

An especially treacherous group of antagonist banded together, determined to kill Evangelist Edward Boehmer. Charles Conn wrote, "One night six masked men broke into the makeshift quarters where [he] was living, while another seventy waited outside. Boehmer and his wife were not there, so the mob dragged Fred Chambers outside and beat him to unconsciousness."[18] Chambers' wife escaped to warn Boehmer, thus saving his life.

But, it would take more than death threats to deter these soldiers of the Cross. The persecutions meant to stop them only added fuel to their Holy Ghost fire as they set their jaws like a flint and moved forward to new frontiers. Years later, Nora Chambers remembered those days: "When we had to walk eighteen and twenty-five miles in one day

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[17] F.G Chambers, An unpublished manuscript. See Conn, *Like a Mighty Army*, 149.
[18] Conn, *Like a Mighty Army*, 149.

to reach an appointment, the trip was made with shouting, dancing, talking in tongues, and praising God. We were all so happy."[19]

To support their families and continue their ministry, Church of God pioneers would work whatever was available by day such as picking cotton or cutting wood and then preach the Gospel at night! Even at that, their existence was meager. J.A. Hill testified, "Sometimes I come in home and we don't have anything to eat but cornbread but thank God for that. Someone has to suffer so let it be me. I am willing to give my life for the Church of God. I feel this great love running through me as I write. Pray that I may stay in the work and preach this great gospel that must go to the ends of the earth."[20]

Despite a multiplicity of hardships, a steady stream of new enlistees reported for hazardous duty. Battlefield commissions were common as the heat of opposition tested and proved the quality or "metal" of the minister. Such was the case of J.C. Underwood of Chattanooga who in the summer of 1912 conducted a new field revival in Woodstock, GA. As the altar filled with seekers, "the powers of darkness" went on the attack, attempting to "*slay*" the saints. But, the soldiers of the cross withstood the demonic opposition, to "claim the promise and pray through and shout the victory." As a result, "There was a great number saved, sanctified, and 22 received the Holy Ghost . . . The church was set in order at Woodstock Ga. with 54 members. Forty-two were baptized in the river."[21] Underwood, who spearheaded this revival received his battlefield promotion

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[19] Nora Chambers, *Lighted Pathway,* (Pathway Press, Cleveland, TN, 1951), 14. See also Conn, *Like a Mighty Army*, 150.

[20] J. A. Hill, "Willing to Give Life For the Church," *The Church of God Evangel*, September 2, 1922, 2. By 1922 the Church of God weekly news magazine had removed *Evening Light* from the title.

[21] George T. Brouayer, "Field Reports," *Evening Light and Church of God Evangel*, September 15, 1912, 7.

and "was ordained Bishop of the Church of God."[22] The energetic and courageous Underwood's name would later resurface in relation to the Church's advancement into South Carolina.

By November of 1913, the Church of God consisted of over 3,000 covenant members, and one hundred and eleven churches in 11 states[23] including such distant places as Colorado, New Mexico, and California. Yet, South Carolina, located only 90 miles from the church's restorative roots in Cherokee County, NC and about 135 miles from Cleveland, TN, had no organized churches. Furthermore, there were six churches in the Bahamas before there was one in S.C.

It cannot be accurately assumed that the General Overseer was not interested. In fact, during the eighth Assembly (January, 1913) Tomlinson appointed H.B. Simmons to serve as State Overseer of South Carolina. However, with no churches or clergy, his appointment would have to have been that of a Missionary/Overseer.[24] When assigning the State Overseers their territories, Tomlinson addressed each one individually. To Simmons he said, "Brother Simmons, It may seem hard to pull you out of Fla. and send you to S. C., but she has said Come! And we must go. As to how to organize and systematize God will give you wisdom."[25]

Unfortunately, it is doubtful Simmons accepted his assignment. He was not reappointed during the ninth Assembly (Nov. 1913) that convened in November of the

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[22] George T. Brouayer, "Field Reports," 7.
[23] *Echoes from the Ninth Annual Assembly of the Churches of God*, (Cleveland, TN: Church of God Publishing House, 1913), 32.
[24] The 8th Assembly Minutes list B. W. Epps of Greenville, SC as the first known delegate from S.C. (*Echoes from the Eighth Annual Assembly of the Churches of God,* 94). He would later be listed as a Licensed Evangelist in November, 1914.
[25] *Echoes from the Ninth Annual Assembly of the Churches of God* (Cleveland, TN: Church of God Publishing House, 1913), 79.

same year.[26] In fact, no one was appointed to South Carolina that year. Of significance, the Minutes of the Ninth Assembly, listed J.B. Simmons as a Bishop working in Florida. Shortly thereafter, he sent a report to the *Evangel* in which he said he was pastoring four churches in Florida.[27] Whether due to health problems, family concerns, or simply a lack of financial support, it does not seem that Simmons embraced the Carolina challenge.

Nonetheless, it does appear that God had another man chosen for the task. According to the North Walhalla (SC) Church of God website:

> "Sometime around 1912 to 1913 a man of God by the name of J. C. Underwood boarded a train in Tennessee and headed for South Carolina. When he arrived in the Walhalla area he met Jacob H. Chapman, who allowed Mr. Underwood to set up his tent on his property. Revival broke out in the community and God poured out his power on all those who attended the revival meeting."[28]

Underwood himself gave his own account of this revival in a written testimony dated July 2, 1914:

> I have just closed a three weeks meeting and am glad to report victory from start to finish . . . Seven baptized with the Holy Ghost, others saved, sanctified and seeking Pentecost.
>
> Thank God for His Healing Power. Three sisters were healed of stomach trouble, one case of 14 yrs. standing. One sister was instantly healed of appendicitis "after suffering many things of many Physicians." A sister who had suffered 20 yrs. . . . was healed instantly through the laying on of hands. Glory to Jesus, the days of miracles are not over. We have with us Bro. W.H. Rogers' daughter, Mrs. Ida Mae Epps, of August Ga who four weeks ago was dying with pellagra in the last stage. In answer to prayer she was instantly healed. She has since been sanctified and filled with the Holy Ghost."

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[26] There were two General Assemblies in 1913; the 8th in January and the 9th in November.
[27] H. B. Simmons, "Ministerial Report," *Evening Light and Church of God Evangel*, February 14, 1914, 3.
[28] North Walhalla Church of God, "South Carolina's First Church of God," http://www.nwcogonline.com/history.html (accessed October 8, 2012).

> We baptized 14 in water and **set the Church of God in order with twenty-six members**. Many others are yet to follow . . . Bro. A. J. Tomlinson was with us three days. His preaching was with power and enjoyed by a host of his friends, who hope to have him visit them again. This field is white unto harvest, and we hope to have many other workers.[29] [emphasis added]

In less than four months following the Walhalla revival, two more churches were set in order. The Tenth Assembly (Nov. 2, 1914) Minutes listed the following churches in SC: Walhalla, (nestled in the extreme N.W. corner of the state) Newry (12 miles S.E. of Walhalla) and Langley[30] (located near Augusta, GA). [31]

Underwood was recognized in the Ninth Assembly Program as the State Overseer of South Carolina,[32] most likely a mid-term replacement for H.B. Simmons. Whether Simmons had been unable or unwilling to accept the SC mandate, J.C. Underwood embraced it eagerly. Hitting the ground running, he called for a Camp Meeting to be held near Walhalla in October of 1914[33] in which F. J. Lee[34] would join him as presiding ministers.

Underwood's report to the Ninth Assembly gives his personal account:

> After leaving Atlanta, Georgia, in the spring . . . The Lord laid upon my heart to go to South Carolina. In the second meeting we had gracious victory and ten received the Holy Ghost, at another place thirteen, and at another twenty-two. God also gave us marvelous healings. One old brother came seventeen miles to be healed of deafness. We put our fingers in his ears and God gave him his

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[29] J. C. Underwood, "Report from South Carolina," *Evening Light and Church of God Evangel*, July 11, 1914, 8.
[30] In the 8th Assembly (Jan. 1913) W H. Johnson of Langley, SC was listed as clerk for the Augusta GA Church of God. It is likely the Langley church was birthed out of that Augusta congregation.
[31] *Echoes from the Tenth Annual Assembly of the Churches of God*, 35.
[32] That first year for the Church of God in SC reported 82 total members in three local churches. See *Echoes from the Tenth Annual Assembly of the Churches of God*, 22. Also listing were B.W. Epps, Sallie Lee, Mrs. M.E Siegler, G.T. Stargel, and Emma Underwood as Evangelist.
[33] "Announcement," *Evening Light and Church of God Evangel*, August 8, 1914, 8.
[34] A greatly respected minister, in 1923 Lee would be selected to replace A.J. Tomlinson as General Overseer.

> hearing. One young man mocked, so the Lord suffered deafness to come upon him and today he is deaf.
>
> We conducted four meetings in South Carolina, and one in Georgia, seventy-five received the Holy Ghost. I am delighted with the work here.
>
> We had sixteen cases of healing, and it is having weight with the people. We are expecting to build a church 40x60." The report continued to say that Underwood sang a song and there were, "Great manifestations of the spirit and rejoicing.[35]

The Church of God revival that had been so prevalent in the surrounding states had finally arrived in South Carolina. Underwood used the popular formula of setting a tent in a new area and preaching a lengthy revival in hopes of planting a new church. With little to no funding, he repeatedly published requests for support.[36]

AJ Tomlinson, in his evangelistic report during the 1914 Assembly gave witness to the dynamism and Pentecostal vigor that prevailed in those days of expansion: "Churches have multiplied . . . Under the illumination of God's love and mighty power many signs and wonders have been wrought in the name of the Holy child Jesus. Many miraculous cases of healings have been witnessed. Wild poison serpents have been taken out and handled . . . In several instances fire has been handled with bare hands without being burned. Glory to God!"[37]

The vision and energy Underwood brought to South Carolina, although powerfully effective, was sadly, short lived. For unknown reasons, by June, 1916 he had moved on to High Point, NC and was followed in succession in South Carolina by W.A. Capshaw (1916) and W.A. Walker (1916-17). Apparently, Capshaw simply filled out the remainder of Underwood's term and Walker never relocated to SC from his Piedmont, AL home. Even though there is evidence that efforts were made by both men, the work was

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[35] "Assembly Reports," *Evening Light and Church of God Evangel*, November 28, 1914, 8.
[36] "Assembly Reports," *Evening Light and Church of God Evangel*, June 5, 1915, 3.
[37] *Echoes from the Tenth Annual Assembly of the Churches of God*, 15.

disappointing, even digressing during their terms in office. In April of 1917, Mary McHargue wrote, "Dear Beloved, there are only two churches in the state of South Carolina . . . If I were to try, I could not describe the awful condition of the people."[38]

The two churches that remained at the end of Walker's tenure were located about 10 miles apart, one in Seneca with 10 members, the other was the original Church in Walhalla with its 82 members. No record remains of what happened to the churches in Langley and Newry.

In the 13th Assembly of 1917 W.H. Cross, a man with experience as a pastor, missionary, and Overseer, was appointed to South Carolina.[39] Although he settled in Walhalla, he acknowledged the need to branch out, when he wrote to Tomlinson, "At present Oconee [County] is the only one having churches. There are thirty-nine counties yet untouched. Is it not time for something to be done?"[40]

The General Assembly scheduled for 1918 was cancelled due to the massive flu epidemic that gripped the United States. However, the evolution of the work can be traced effectively through the pages of the Church's weekly newspaper, now, simply called the *Evangel*. One such report in October 1918 recounted, "Brother Cross, the overseer of the state, came to Rock Hill Sept. 14, and stayed until Sept. 19. During that time he set the Church of God in order with twenty-five members."[41] This church plant in Rock Hill was significant insomuch that Cross would eventually relocate his home and office there in September, 1919. This move may have been facilitated by a return of the influential J.C.

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[38] Mary McHargue, "To the Saints Everywhere," *The Church of God Evangel*, April 7, 1917, 3.
[39] Prior to moving to SC, Cross had served six months as Overseer of the Bahamas. See: Conn, 183, & 385.
[40] W.A. Cross, "Walhalla, SC," *The Church of God Evangel*, March 23, 1918, 4.
[41] W.T. Sears, "Rock Hill, SC," *The Church of God Evangel*, October 5, 1918, 3.

Underwood to his old stomping grounds. With Underwood in Walhalla serving as District Overseer and Cross residing in Rock Hill, the "Old South State" now had two qualified and respected leaders directing organization and expansion efforts.

Under Cross's supervision, the two churches he inherited in Oconee County multiplied to fifteen with 492 members by the time his appointment ended in 1921. While the northwestern district around Walhalla and Seneca remained the most populous for the Church of God, strong leaders and budding new church plants were emerging in the Greenville, Rock Hill, and Columbia areas.

Cross's successful tenure of leadership would end with the General Assembly of 1921.[42] Following in his footsteps, J. W. Culpepper became one of the most significant characters in Church of God/Church of God of Prophecy history. Due to an escalating power struggle in Cleveland, by the time Culpepper arrived in SC, storm clouds were already gathering; turbulent seas were on the horizon. And, as the tides of restlessness churned, the task of leading the church in South Carolina would fall heavily on Culpepper's shoulders.

Culpepper was one of seven brothers from Lake Park, GA, all known to be full of the Holy Ghost, and like his brothers, J.W. was an effective minister.[43] He was first listed in Church documents in 1913 as an ordained Bishop.[44] With great zeal and courage typical of his generation, he became renowned for evangelist exploits. In July 1921 he shared his testimony of revival in Branford, FL, "The Lord gave us one of the best

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[42] By 1922 the 17th Assembly Minutes list Cross residing in Miami FL. See *Minutes of the Seventeenth Annual Assembly of the Churches of God* (Cleveland, TN: Church of God Publishing House, 1922), 79.
[43] M.S. Lemons, "Report," *The Church of God Evangel*, Feb. 7, 1914, 8.
[44] *Echoes from the Eighth Annual Assembly of the Churches of God* (Cleveland, TN: Church of God Publishing House, 1913), 85.

meetings there that I have ever been in. There were 56 who received the Holy Ghost and there were so many saved and sanctified that we couldn't keep account of them. Sometimes the power would sweep up and down the altar and people would fall prostrate on the floor and then come through speaking in other tongues. There were sixty-two added to the great Church of God and 49 baptized in water."[45]

Culpepper was obviously a charismatic leader of men. After his appointment to SC, the Evangel published an lengthy open letter written by L.C Davis entitled: "Florida's Loss – South Carolina's Gain" in which he spoke eloquently of Culpepper's character, integrity, and leadership qualities. Even though Davis admitted that he was not a member of the church, he nevertheless lamented, "there may be others just as good sent to us, but they cannot send one that is better." He continued, "I learned to know Mr. Culpepper and found him to be all my ideals of a Christian."[46]

Even though Culpepper consistently listed his residence in Lake Park, GA, reports of great revivals, healings, and miracles increased daily after his appointment. One such account of a revival meeting in Belton, SC was published in the July 8, 1922 Evangel in which, "thirty-seven [were] saved, fifteen sanctified, six received the Holy Ghost and . . . the Church set in order with seventeen members." Furthermore, "On Saturday night before the service closed there was a great light seen by many under the tent. The Lord did wonderfully bless in praying for the sick."[47]

Culpepper, was listed as one of the ministers conducting the meeting in Honea Path in which, "Fifty-two were saved, quite a number sanctified, eight or ten received the

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[45] J.W. Culpepper, "Revival Report," *The Church of God Evangel*, July 30, 1921, 2.
[46] L.C. Davis, "Florida's Loss – South Carolina's Gain," *The Church of God Evangel*, January 21, 1922, 4.
[47] Myrtle Whitehead, "A Light Seen by Many," *The Church of God Evangel*, July 8, 1922, 2.

Holy Ghost, twelve were added to the Church and seven followed the Lord in water baptism."[48]

In addition to the surging numbers of new converts, reports of miraculous healings became more commonplace. Under the title, "God Wonderfully Heals," the August 12, 1922 *Evangel* told of supernatural events around Lockhart, SC:

> Mrs. John I. Thomas was suffering very much with cancer of the stomach. She had been to Atlanta, Ga., and had X-ray pictures taken so the doctor would know how to treat her . . . He told her that she had only a few more days in this world.
>
> Mrs. Thomas grew worse and the doctor was sent for again. He said, "There is no use of me going but to please her I will go." When he went and she said, "Dr. Hope, is there no chance for me?" and he replied, "You may live forty-eight hours," and left. Mr. Thomas came to me and said, "Brother Gault, will you and your wife go over to my home and pray for my wife? She will not live long." I said, "Mr. Thomas, the dear Lord can heal your wife and make her well."
>
> We went over to Sister Thomas' and the Lord directed me to read the 11th chapter of John. I said, "Sister, now do you believe that He can heal you?" She replied, "I know He can do all things." We went down before God and he wonderfully healed her . . . On the succeeding days she washed dishes, cooked for family of nine, did the washing, scoured her house and on Sunday she went sixty-seven miles to see her daughter.
>
> He goes on to list several other instances of healings: "Fred Hefner, two broken ribs healed; John Tadlock's little girl healed of fever; W. J. Cooper's little baby healed of jaundice and spasms; Mr. Lee Champan's little baby of chronic colic."[49]

As news spread of revivals, healings, miracles, and new churches being established, the confidence of the people in their State Overseer grew exponentially. While celebrating the acquisition of a new church building in Columbia, Carrie Stukes wrote, "the state of South Carolina is coming to the front and we thank the Lord for our

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[48] Nettie Hanvey, "Revival Report," *The Church of God Evangel*, July 29, 1922, 2.
[49] E.C. Gault, "God Wonderfully Heals," *The Church of God Evangel*, August 12, 1922, 3.

state overseer, Brother J. W Culpepper. He is [the] very man for the position he holds."[50]

A few days later, Ed Johnson reported a meeting held at Greenville, S. C. He wrote, "The overseer was in charge and did some wonderful preaching. Twenty were saved, fifteen sanctified, sixteen receive the Holy Ghost and fifteen were added to the church."[51] About that same time, in Bennettsville, SC a meeting was held in which there were, "twenty-nine saved, eight sanctified, and six received the Holy Ghost."[52] Less than a month later another revival was reported in Greenville in which 63 were saved, 41 sanctified, 23 filled with the Holy Ghost, 24 added to the Church and 12 baptized in water.[53] On the heels of these reports came further word of the continuing revival in Greenville; a two-week meeting in which, "Thirty-one were saved, twenty-one sanctified, eleven filled with the Holy Ghost. These numbers, with the number of those saved in other meetings makes a total of ninety-four saved, sixty -two sanctified and thirty-four filled with the Holy Ghost."[54]

Consequently, as the work prospered, a deep sense of corporate pride was swelling in the hearts of the saints. They were proud of their state and proud to be part of the great Church of God. Along with this new attitude came a deepening respect for and commitment to their leader, Bishop Culpepper. S.D. Cooper, the influential pastor

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[50] Carrie Stukes, "New Church in Columbia, S.C.," *The Church of God Evangel*, August 12, 1922, 4.
[51] Ed Johnson, "Battlefields," *The Church of God Evangel*, August 26, 1922, 2.
[52] Author unknown, "God is Still Working in South Carolina," *The Church of God Evangel*, September 9, 1922, 2.
[53] E.C. Gault, "South Carolina Comes to the Front," *The Church of God Evangel*, October 21, 1922, 4.
[54] M.C. Ward, "Revival Report," *The Church of God Evangel*, November 18, 1922, 2.

of the Columbia church penned an account of the 16-day Camp Meeting held in Columbia that began August 25, 1922:

> Sixteen were saved, twelve sanctified, twelve filled with the Holy Ghost, seven were added to the church, three followed the Lord in water baptism and others are looking this way. We had large crowds nearly all the time, it is estimated that the congregation at different times number a thousand or more. The people did not want the meeting to close.
>
> J. W. Culpepper, our state overseer, was in charge of the meeting and he certainly made some fine talks . . . The power would fall and the men and women would leap, bound, dance and shout and talk in tongues in the good old-fashioned way.
>
> We truly believe that we have one of the finest men for our state overseer. He is so humble and kind. We do hope that the Lord will give him back to us another year . . . We are so glad to see the grand old Church of God coming to the front --- the one we love so well.[55]

However, when the Seventeenth Assembly met in November of 1922 there was a growing undercurrent of discontent, generated by "a power struggle between the church's leader and dominant figure, A.J. Tomlinson, and other leaders who constituted the "Supreme Council" of the church."[56] Even if the rank and file laity remained devoted to Tomlinson,[57] many in the Church hierarchy were growing disenchanted by what they perceived as his, "autocratic sway over the organization."[58]

Church of God Historian, Dr. David Roebuck, said, "Tomlinson's leadership would come to an end in the Church of God. From 1903 to 1923 this visionary leader proposed ministries and willingly accepted the mandate of the membership to lead those

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[55] S.D. Cooper, "Camp Meeting a Success in South Carolina," *The Church of God Evangel,* October 7, 1922, 3.

[56] Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition,* 197. See also Robins, *A.J. Thompson, Plainfolk Modernist,* 222-225.

[57] In the official Church of God weekly magazine, *The Church of God Evangel,* there were numerous reports of the favor Tomlinson maintained among the churches in SC. See *The Church of God Evangel,* March 3, 1923, April 21, 1923, and May 26, 1923 editions.

[58] Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: the Making of American Pentecostalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1979), 161.

ministries. For most of those twenty years the membership loved and followed their charismatic leader. They gladly supported his proposals and pushed him forward as God's theocratic leader of the Church of God. [59]

Lillie Duggar served as Tomlinson private secretary for over twenty years. Her devoted admiration for him is evidenced as she wrote in her memoirs, "By the help of the Lord, A. J. Tomlinson had built the Church of God until it was worth something. I realize he had help from others. But, he carried the burden and bore the load in order for the Church to advance as it did."[60]

As General Overseer, Tomlinson felt the weight of the rulings and directives of the Assembly. According to Duggar, "When action was taken by the Assembly, A. J. Tomlinson was given the responsibility of starting and carrying on every new project. He did that when the Assembly ordered a paper published. He did it when the Assembly approved the printing of Sunday school literature. He did it when the Assembly decided the Church should own a printing plant. He did it when it was decided to have a Bible school. He did it when it was necessary to build an auditorium for the Assembly to convene in. He did it when all additions were made to the publishing house. He borrowed money and stood good for it for the many advancements that were made."[61]

It would have been difficult to fund the proliferation of ministry projects in a thriving economy. However, as America was coming out of WWI a "deadly influenza

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[61] *Restorationism and a Vision for World Harvest: A Brief History of the Church of God* (Cleveland, Tennessee) By David G. Roebuck, Ph.D. (Revised 10 February 1999) http://cogheritage.org/histories_of_cog/page/brief_history_of_the_church_of_god_by_david_roebuck_ph_d/

[60] Lillie Duggar, *A.J. Tomlinson: Former General Overseer of the Church of God* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1964), 226.

[61] Duggar, *A.J. Tomlinson*, 227.

pandemic erupted."[62] "For the first time in American history, the United States population declines. The decline of fifty thousand people is attributed to war casualties [in addition to the epidemic]."[63]

With mounting war debts combined with the economic effects of the flu pandemic, America entered the 1920s on the bring of a financial crash, one that Thomas Woods called "The Forgotten Depression."[64] According to Woods, "The economic situation in 1920 was grim [*as*] unemployment had jumped from 4 percent to nearly 12 percent, and GNP declined 17 percent." The effects of the decline was far reaching as the price for farm products fell, "to 85 percent of the levels of 1919; cotton falls to eleven cents per pound, down from forty-two cents."[65] Things were no better for factory works as they saw their wages cut and their workload increase.[66]

In this environment, Tomlinson's emboldened dissenters were given the ammunition they were seeking as he struggled to stretch church reserves to meet the financial challenges. Duggar wrote, "Tomlinson was placed in a difficult position. He had no money and those who stood with him had very little. He was handicapped in many ways but by the help of the Lord he found ways to do some things and he working at the job with all of his heart against all odds."[67] Most egregious was "the heavy indebtedness

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[62] Molly Billings, "The Influenza Pandemic of 1918," February, 2005, accessed June 25, 2013, https://virus.stanford.edu/uda/.
[63] Vincent Tompkins, ed., *American Decades*, Gale Virtual Reference Library (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, n.d.), 385.
[64] Thomas E. Woods, "The Forgotten Depression of 1920," Mises Institute, November 27, 2009, accessed January 19, 2015, http://mises.org/library/forgotten-depression-1920. For further insight see: Robert P. Murphy "The Depression You've Never Heard Of: 1920-1921," Foundation for Economic Education, November 18, 2009, accessed June 25, 2013, http://fee.org/freeman/detail/the-depression-youve-never-heard-of-1920-1921.
[65] Tompkins, *American Decades,* 76.
[66] Tompkins, *American Decades,* 77-78.
[67] Duggar, *A.J. Tomlinson*, 229.

on the newly constructed auditorium, and the newly launched orphanage work."[68] Like countless other administrators facing similar situations, the General Overseer "borrowed from Peter to pay Paul."

C.T. Davidson explained that, "When certain notes came due on the auditorium and the other headquarters buildings and business, rather than suffer a foreclosure and perhaps plunge the Church into bankruptcy, the General Overseer used some of the tithes that belonged to the preachers on the field – a little at a time, hoping to get in enough funds to reimburse the ministers."[69] When he explained the situation at the following Assembly, "the considerate ministers agreed to donate their back tithes to the cause."[70] While the affected pastors were sympathetic, Tomlinson's antagonist had found the "chink in the armor," the issue they were seeking to break Tomlinson's grip on the church.

A committee composed of J.S. Llewellyn, F.J. Lee and J.B. Ellis hired an auditor to review the church's books. After a cursory review, the auditor charged Tomlinson with a shortage of $14,141.83. He made the charge even though he admitted that he did not review all the financial records. Accord to Davidson, "The whole thing was erroneous and was later declared the Court as "utterly worthless.""[71] With no supporting evidence, the Llewellyn and Lee faction charged Tomlinson with malfeasances ranging from misappropriating of funds to outright theft.[72]

After much political positioning, in July 1923 Tomlinson was removed from the office of the general overseer. Soon after impeaching Tomlinson, the Elders Council selected F. J. Lee to lead the Church of God. Current Church of God

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[68] C. T. Davidson, *Upon This Rock*, 1:573 (Cleveland TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1973).
[69] Davidson, *Upon This Rock*, 573.
[70] Davidson, *Upon This Rock*, 574.
[71] Davidson, *Upon This Rock*, 573.
[72] Tomlinson was totally exonerated in every court action taken against him.

historian, David Roebuck, simply concludes, "A financial crisis brought about by a weakened economy, an enormous debt and poor management precipitated the final confrontation."[73]

Trauma engulfed the Church following Tomlinson's removal from office. "From 1923 forward there would be two main branches of the Church of God, fiercely competing for members, property, and the legal right to be called "The Church of God."[74] Meanwhile, both divisions of the Church of God (Tomlinson's and Lee's) claimed to be the continuation of the original, New Testament Church.

On the field, local congregations were confused by the differing reports and propaganda disseminated from ardent supporters of each side. But as contemporary leadership development expert, John Maxwell says: "Everything rises and falls on leadership."[75] And, leadership is exactly what J.W. Culpepper supplied to the Lee faction.

In his report to the 18th General Assembly (Nov. 1923) he reported, "By looking in the faces of these people from South Carolina you can see that they stand for truth and right. I credit the success of the work in this state to this band of noble workers who are with me on this platform. While the clouds have been flying we have not had a jar."[76]

The timing of Tomlinson's impeachment fell perfectly in order for Culpepper to hold SC together and he masterfully took control of his state. A. J. Tomlinson was removed from office on July 26th. The Evangel carried the announcement of F.J. Lee's

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[73] David G. Roebuck, Church of God Historian, is director of the Dixon Pentecostal Research Center.
[74] Robins, *A.J. Tomlinson, Plainfolk Modernist*, 225.
[75] John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), viii.
[76] *Minutes of the Seventeenth Annual Assembly of the Churches of God*, 13.

succession to power in the paper dated August 4, 1923. The South Carolina State Camp Meeting had been previously scheduled to convene in Columbia on August 16th. With the speed of mail delivery it is possible that the membership in South Carolina did not receive their Evangel, dated Aug. 4th for several days. By the time the news of Tomlinson's ouster got to the people they probably had only a few days (*maybe less than a week*) to digest the information given before their greatly beloved and respected State Overseer, J. W. Culpepper would meet to instruct, lead, and guide them, while helping to shape their reaction to the events as they were transpiring.

Only a few days after the State Camp Meeting, Culpepper would report to Lee, "I just read your piece in the *Evangel* wanting all the state overseers to write you and let you know how we are standing.

"I guess you really know how I am standing, but I will write you anyway. I am standing strictly with you brethren, with all the assemblies and councils of the Church of God up to date, but have no fellowship with A. J. T., G. T. B., and S. O. G. who tried to drag off on July the 24th.

"When I left Cleveland, I came to S. C. and have kept close touch with the workers ever since. If there is a single one in the state that is standing with A. J. T., I don't know it. Every thing is standing true to the Church of God. Some seemed to be a little discouraged, but that is about cleared away and every thing is moving on nicely."[77]

How successful was Culpepper's plan to hold all the churches, ministers, membership, and properties for the Lee branch of the Church of God? The Minutes of

[77] J.W. Culpepper, "A Few Thoughts About the Work in General," *The Church of God Evangel*, August 25, 1923. While it was not the practice at the time, for some reason Culpepper referred to A.J. Tomlinson and the two members of the Executive Council who had stood by him (George T. Brouayer and S.O. Gillaspie) only by their initials.

the 1922 Assembly list 25 Church of God congregations in South Carolina. One year later, the Minutes of the 1923 Assembly, which was the first Assembly after Tomlinson's impeachment, list 33 churches aligned with F.J. Lee. Remarkably, every church recorded in the 1922 was still listed as part of the 1923 Lee faction. It is a testament to Culpepper's leadership as well as the organizational hierarchy of Lee's inner-circle that during the tumultuous days encompassing the 1922-23 split, the churches in South Carolina unanimously aligning with Lee, even increasing in number. Records show eight new churches organized with an increase of 176 in membership.[78]

It also appears that all Bishops and Deacons as well as most licensed Evangelist remained allied with the Church of God of F.J. Lee. The only indication that some ministers and perhaps a few members of that era remained affiliated with A.J. Tomlinson is a review of the list of evangelists in South Carolina. Five evangelists listed in the 1922 (Lee branch) records were no longer listed in the 1923 Assembly records. It is possible that some of these may have remained faithfully aligned with AJ Tomlinson.[79] However, there seems to be no independently substantiated record of this.

Looking back over the past 90 year history of the two churches, the reasons for the separation are not nearly as important as the resulting changes to the Pentecostal landscape that ensued from the traumatic divide. As with all such family feuds, there was much damage, confusion, and hurt as the mission of advancing the Kingdom of God suffered immeasurable harm.

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[78] Minutes of the 17th Annual Assembly (Nov. 1-7, 1922) show a total church membership in SC of 766. Minutes for the 18th Annual Assembly (Nov. 1-7, 1923) shows 942 total members.
[79] *Minutes of the Seventeenth Annual Assembly,* 97-98.

CHAPTER 4. THE DARK AND DESPERATE YEARS – STARTING OVER

Things are looking up!
When you are flat on your back that's the only way you can look.[1]
-M. S. Curry

The storm clouds that were ever present over the Church of God in 1922 - 23 seemed to block the golden rays of the "Son" as gross darkness, brought on by an internal power struggle, created a feeling of general malaise and despair. Increasingly, A.J. Tomlinson was verbally attacked, accused of misdeeds, vilified in public, and viciously berated by some who had previously constituted his inner circle. Discord was widespread throughout the upper echelon of leadership. Consequently, the Holy Spirit was grieved, evidenced by the fact that there were few instances of spiritual outpourings, messages and interpretations, shouting, dancing, and rejoicing in the Spirit recorded in the Assembly of '22. Such manifestations had been in great evidence in every prior Assembly.

Leading the charge against Tomlinson for the opposition was J. S. Llewellyn, editor of the church periodical, the Evangel. The battle for control of the Church of God and more precisely, the office of the General Overseer, engendered extreme antagonism such as should never be seen among Christians. For example, in discussing a particular business aspect of the Assembly, the General Overseer, as was his custom, called the Assembly to prayer when it seemed no headway was being made. Tomlinson reported that while engaged in prayer, "J. S. Llewellyn ran up to me in a rage and shook his fist and pointed his finger almost against my face and said, 'How dare you block this measure in

[1] M. S. Curry served as State Overseer in the Church of God (of Prophecy) for 39 years. He was renown for his wise and often comedic anecdotes.

any such way. You dare not do it, you dare not do it'; and walked away white with madness."[2]

The irreconcilable differences between Tomlinson and those who desired to remove him from his office culminated in a painful divorce made official in July 1923. As in most divorces, everyone suffered. Typically, in such separations the apportioning of assets is seldom equal. After planning for such a separation for many months, the insurgent faction led by Flavius J. Lee was well positioned to take control of the overwhelming majority of Church properties and resources, and thus they did.

Tomlinson saw the events of 1923 as a Spiritual purging; a purifying that would remove from the Church the dissenters and brawlers who despised Theocracy, preferring man-made creeds. While Tomlinson seemed to readily embrace this opportunity for a new beginning, it came at a tremendous cost.

Consequently, at age 58 Ambrose Jessup Tomlinson found himself starting over with essentially nothing to show for his 20 years of visionary leadership in the Church. Of the over 21,000 members in the Church of God in 1922 it is estimated that less than 5000 remained aligned with Tomlinson. This estimate is unverifiable and many historians believe it be overly optimistic. Author and educator, James Stone, explained that accurate numerical data was unavailable because of, "the confusion that existed in Cleveland in those years of 1923 – 1927."[3]

Lacking timely communication and transportation, many church members and local pastors were unsure of the issues that led to the split and were equally unsure of which side of the Church of God their membership and allegiances should remain.

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[2] James Stone, *The Church of God of Prophecy History & Polity* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1977), 46.
[3] Stone, *The Church*, 51.

Further complicating matters for Tomlinson was the instantaneous transitioning of the power of the pen from his hand to Llewellyn and his colleagues. Stone observed that, "because of so many rumors floating around and the members on the field getting only one side of the story through the Llewellyn–slanted *Evangel*, the disruption resulted in a loss of about two-thirds to three-fourths of the church's membership."[4]

Llewellyn, while accusing Tomlinson of "misappropriation of funds," was later publicly vilified by a Bradley Chancery Court judge for exactly the same charges.[5] He would eventually be dismissed as editor of the *Evangel* because his "services had become increasingly undesirable."[6] Conversely, while his chief antagonist was openly chided in court for his financial misdeeds and deceptions, Tomlinson "was totally cleared (exonerated) of any charges of the misuse, mismanagement, or misappropriation of funds by the Civil Courts."[7]

Addressing the twenty-first Annual Assembly held in 1926, Judge Murray of Chattanooga declared, "Every question that was in court was decided in favor of A.J. Tomlinson."[8] Nevertheless, just as winning a battle does not mean you have won the war, any dreams of a quick end to the litigious process and the even more libelous personal confrontations encountered between the two Church of God factions were simply

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[4] Stone, *The Church*, 51. J. S. Llewellyn, a staunch supporter of F. J. Lee and ardent opponent of A. J. Tomlinson was the lead instigator in bringing accusations against Tomlinson in the years leading up to and immediately following the 1923 upheaval. As editor of the Evangel, Llewellyn used the power of his pen to incessantly assault Tomlinson's name and character.
[5] *Church of God vs. A. J. Tomlinson.* Bradley Chancery Court, (July 3, 1926) 26, 28.
[6] Charles W. Conn, *Like a Mighty Army Moves the Church of God* (Cleveland, TN: Church of God Publishing House, 1955), 196, 203.
[7] Daniel D. Preston, *The Era of A. J. Tomlinson* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1984), 151.
[8] *Minutes of Our Twenty First Annual Assembly of the Church over which A. J. Tomlinson is General Overseer* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1926), 39.

premature and delusional. The war in the courts would continue for much of the next 30 years with ill feelings among ministers and members lasting much longer.[9]

For A. J. Tomlinson and his family these were trying years.[10] It was reported that they "scarcely had any food on the table, no coal, or wood, and at times picked on and prayed upon by "freeloaders" of all kinds, but they never turn anyone aside."[11] Lillie Dugger, who worked many years as Tomlinson's private secretary remembers that, "He had no money and those who stood with him had very little. He was handicapped in many ways, but by the help of the Lord he found ways to do some things and he kept on working at the job with all of his heart against all odds."[12]

The group that opposed Tomlinson in 1923 had pre-positioned themselves to successfully retain most of the Church's resources including property, printing, and publishing facilities. Duggar recounted that they used every available means at their disposal to undermine and attack Tomlinson, "Almost everywhere, if not everywhere, that A. J. Tomlinson went he met the accusation that he was a thief. And there were many other accusations too numerous to mention. The Church of God Evangel, the paper that had been almost sacred and had blessed so many thousands of readers, was used in those

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[9] Over the past 30 years efforts have intensified to bring a more charitable spirit of love and reconciliation between the Church of God and the Church of God of Prophecy. Officials from each Church have spoken at the other's Assemblies. In 2003, the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee) announced a new joint global evangelistic initiative to be untaken with the Church of God of Prophecy. On January 26, 2006 leaders from both groups met at the site of the 1st General Assembly for a commemorative Centennial Celebration of the 1906 event.

[10] For additional biographical information on the life of A.J. Tomlinson see Lillie Duggar, *A.J. Tomlinson: Former General Overseer of the Church of God* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1964); R.G. Robins, *A. J. Tomlinson, Plainfolk Modernist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); *Diary of A. J. Tomlinson 1901-1924: The Church of God Heritage Series* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2012); *Diary of A. J. Tomlinson 1925-1943: The Church of God Heritage Series* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2012).

[11] Davidson, *Upon This Rock*, 640.

[12] Duggar, *A.J. Tomlinson,* 229.

days to slander and condemn, to falsely accuse and try to destroy those who were standing for the right."[13]

When Abraham Lincoln faced similar opposition a half century earlier, he said, "If I were to try to read, much less answer, all the attacks made on me, this shop might as well be closed for any other business. I do the very best I know how - the very best I can; and I mean to keep doing so until the end. If the end brings me out all right, what's said against me won't amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, ten angels swearing I was right would make no difference."[14] In much the same manner, Tomlinson preferred spending his energy in planning, preaching, and moving forward than to spend one minute in his self-defense. Thus, he immediately took to the task of recovering, reinforcing, and rebuilding the Church of God.

Ever the proponent of the written word no one should have been surprised at the speed with which Tomlinson set in operation a new Church newspaper. Less than two months after his official divorce from his dissenters, Tomlinson began a new publishing era when the first edition of the *White Wing Messenger* rolled off the presses, dated September 15, 1923. This news periodical has since been published without disruption for over 90 years.

With equally astonishing haste, plans were made to host the 18th Annual Assembly to be held in Cleveland, convening November 22-27, 1923. The challenges were countless. He had lost control of the new auditorium (opened in 1920) in which he had planned to have the meeting. But, whether he had an auditorium or not, he certainly planned to have an Assembly. In an open-air meeting held on the corner of Short Street

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[13] Duggar, *A.J. Tomlinson,* 229.
[14] Francis B. Carpenter, *The Inner Life of Abraham Lincoln: Six Months at the White House* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 258-59.

and Central Avenue on September 25th, Tomlinson stood on a box and preached an inspirational sermon to the faithful, as well as the curious onlookers. Duggar recounts that, "it was suggested that the lot be purchased . . . and this met with a hearty response. The purchase price of the lot was nine hundred dollars, and Tomlinson raised this amount in less than a week and paid cash for it.[15]

During this chaotic time, Tomlinson was being pulled in many directions as ministers and members were asking him to appear and answer their questions. However, before leaving on one such mission he commissioned his faithful friend A. J. Lawson to see to it that a new building would be erected in time for the upcoming meeting. Duggar said, "Brother Lawson did this and it was not long until a small tabernacle was ready and the 18th Annual Assembly . . . was conducted at this new location."[16] Although the hastily constructed building was small and had only wood shavings for a floor, it certainly served its purpose.[17] According to Duggar, "On the opening night of the Assembly the heavens seem to bend low and kiss the earth, and the happy saints shouted and danced in the Spirit."[18]

It is hard to imagine how that only four months after losing 75% of the organization he had spent 20 years building, Tomlinson rose to moderate the 18th

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[15] Duggar, *A.J. Tomlinson,* 221-222.
[16] Duggar, *A.J. Tomlinson,* 222.
[17] While being accused of financial misdeeds by his opposition, Tomlinson had little trouble raising support to start a new publication as well as the purchasing of new property and the construction of an auditorium. On Oct. 19, 1923 a group of 39 prominent businessmen and community leaders including six bankers, the Mayor of Cleveland, a County Judge, newspapermen and doctors signed an affidavit stating that in their business dealings with Tomlinson they "always found him honest and straightforward in all his business transactions with us." Furthermore, "Mr. Tomlinson bears as excellent reputation in this community for integrity and character, and we consider him an honest, upright Christian gentleman" (Davidson, *Upon This Rock,* 131-32).
[18] Duggar, *A.J. Tomlinson,* 222.

Assembly in much the same manner he had the previous seventeen. His sermons were inspired, challenging his soldiers to take courage, and focus on doing the work of the Last Day's Church. All present were reminded of their "Commission" and responsibilities before God. In closing his address to the Assembly he said, "I stand for the Church of God just as I have told it for years, which most of you know. There is no compromise, no letdown, no weakening to gain favor of men."[19]

Many powerful and wondrous signs and demonstrations were present at the 18th Assembly. "Fire was handled under the mighty power of the Holy Ghost, and like as fire played over the congregation many times and was seen by various people. Visions of Jesus, beautiful doves and other things of heavenly beauty were seen by some."[20] Clara T. Mabe wrote in the December 2, 1923 edition of the White Wing Messenger, "One brother with a burning box raised it to his face, the blaze going up into his nostrils (but he was not burned) . . . A sister was moved . . . to play the piano and sing in other tongues."[21] Tomlinson's supporters took these signs as confirmation of God's continued approval upon him.

After the powerful manifestations of the 1923 Assembly, Tomlinson resumed his hectic schedule of travel, preaching, reclaiming, and restoring some of his historic constituency. While faithfully functioning as the dominant figure of the local church in Cleveland, which boasted an attendance in excess of two hundred, Tomlinson was increasingly called upon to visit countless locales as more and more people sought clarification and direction. In those regions where Tomlinson made personal appearances,

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[19] *Minutes of Our Eighteenth Annual Assembly of the Church over which A. J. Tomlinson is General Overseer* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1923), 39.
[20] Duggar, *A.J. Tomlinson,* 226.
[21] Buford M. Johnson, *Written in Heaven* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1971), 40.

large numbers of people aligned with him. Bishop M. S. Curry, who once served as pastor of the local Church where Tomlinson was a member said, "The people loved A. J. Tomlinson! Whenever he was able to present his side of the story to them personally, the majority believed and support him."[22] However, Curry claimed that Tomlinson never owned a car. Consequently, with limited transportation, meager funds, and the ever-increasing demands on his time, there were never enough opportunities for such face-to-face meetings with those who desperately needed to see him and hear his voice.

Amidst constant attacks and diminished resources, A. J. and his supporters were nonetheless experiencing feelings of transforming liberty as the yoke of man-made creeds fell from their necks.[23] Beginning immediately after the '23 Assembly they took to their work with rekindled fire, energy, and a rejuvenated sense of purpose. "Perhaps some of the greatest revivals this side of the "Arise, Shine" of the Church of God took place in the late 1920s and 1930s as the Church, with a fresh determination, launched out into many new regions and places."[24] From the small group of possibly 5,000 who remained with Tomlinson in 1923, the church grew to over 21,000 members by 1933, with "about as many local churches as [*had been*] lost . . . and about a thousand ministers."[25]

Unfortunately, South Carolina was not one of the locations Tomlinson toured in his restorative efforts. Actually, if Tomlinson could have visited the state he would have been hard-pressed to find any loyal followers remaining.

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[22] 'Battle Ax Bill' Curry, a successful itinerate tent Evangelist served under Tomlinson's direction and was appointed as State Overseer of Florida during the Assembly of 1929. Consequently, his son, Maurice Shepard (M.S. Curry) was familiar with Tomlinson as well as the spiritual, ecclesiastical climate pervading during the traumatic years following the 1923 Church split.
[23] Tomlinson and his constituents believed that the Constitution adapted in the 1921 Assembly had removed the church from theocratic government, placing them under human devised creeds.
[24] Stone, *The Church*, 51.
[25] A. J. Tomlinson, *Answering the Call of God*, 23.

J. W. Culpepper was the beloved State Overseer in South Carolina in the years leading up to the July 1923 disruption. Consolidating his forces with the Lee faction, he had masterfully shepherded all of the churches under his charge to Lee's regime, and vigorously joined the group's antagonism against Tomlinson.

According to the Assembly Minutes of 1922, there were 25 Church of God congregations in South Carolina.[26] The next year, immediately after the bitter disruption, the 18th Assembly Minutes (Lee's) list 33 churches.[27] Remarkably, every church listed in the 1922 record was numbered with Lee in 1923.

It is a testament to the leadership skills of J.W. Culpepper and the organizational hierarchy of Lee's Headquarters' team that during the tumultuous times encompassing the 1922-23 split, the churches in South Carolina aligned unanimously with F. J. Lee. Another testimony to Culpepper's effectiveness is that at the same time he was ushering all the churches from Tomlinson to Lee's camp, he oversaw the organizing of eight new churches and an increase in total membership of 176.[28]

It also appears that all of the ordained Bishops and Deacons, as well as most licensed Evangelists, chose to affiliate with the Lee branch of the Church of God. The only indication of the possibility that some ministers and perhaps a few members remained with Tomlinson is a review of the list of evangelists in South Carolina at the time of the split. Five evangelists listed in the 1922 records were no longer listed with the Lee branch in 1923 official records, and some of these may have maintained their

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[26] *Minutes of Seventeenth Annual Assembly,* 95-96.
[27] *Minutes of Eighteenth Annual Assembly,* 97-98.
[28] The Minutes of the 17th Annual Assembly (Nov. 1-7, 1922) show a total church membership in SC of 766. The Minutes of the 18th Annual Assembly (Nov. 1-7, 1923) shows 942 total members.

connection with Tomlinson.[29] However, there is no independently substantiated record of this being the case.

While Tomlinson was greatly loved and revered in South Carolina, there were forces at work that would undermine his influence and diffuse his once powerful standing. Fred Fisher[30] was acquainted with Roy Reeves, a young man who, prior to the '23 disruption was a minister and member of the successful Church in Greenville. Reeves recounted to Fisher of how he listened through a slightly opened door as a group of leading Church officials discussed ways to remove Tomlinson from office and replace him. Although Reeves was just beginning his ministry, he admitted being extremely distressed over the conversations and plotting he had overheard. He resolved that he would not be a party to such deeds and thus, became one of the few who stood by Tomlinson.[31] Reeves would emerge as a respected statesmen in the Church of God of Prophecy until his death some forty years later.

The actions taken against A. J. Tomlinson in July of 1923 had not been entered into without much thought and advanced planning. In a letter written from F. J. Lee to an unknown recipient addressed only as "My dear brother" dated January 1, 1922, Lee wrote, "Probably you remember the statement I made to you before the assembly that the break would come sooner or later and we had just as well have it one time as another, but you begged me out of it." Lee continued, "we will have to get along the best we can but the break is still coming and will come sooner or later anyway."

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[29] *Minutes of Eighteenth Annual Assembly,* 97-98.
[30] Fred S. Fisher served as General Overseer of the Church of God of Prophecy from 2000-06. However, he began his ministry in SC where he worked as Pastor and State Overseer for many years. His knowledge of the people and churches is invaluable.
[31] Fred S. Fisher, interviewed by author, Fort Mill, SC, March 16, 2013.

Furthermore, Culpepper revealed his involvement with the dissenters in a personal letter to Lee who published it in the Evangel newspaper on August 25, 1923 (only a month after the July disruption.) Culpepper left no doubt as to his allegiance, "I guess you really know how I am standing, but I will write you anyway. I am standing strictly with you."[32] Later in the letter he seems to reference a previous meeting with Lee and possibly others when he wrote, "When I left Cleveland, I came to S. C. and have kept close touch with the workers ever since. If there is a single one in the state that is standing with A. J. T., I don't know it."

Logistically, it seems unlikely that this stated meeting between Culpepper and Lee happened between July 24th, the date of Tomlinson's impeachment, and August 25th, the time when the Evangel was published. Culpepper had been busy in South Carolina conducting the State Camp Meeting in August. These meetings generally lasted a week or longer. It would seem that the Evangel would have been written and prepared for printing many days before the August 25th date line, thus leaving little time for Culpepper to have traveled to Cleveland and met with Lee and his associates. However, regardless of the timing of the meeting, it is obvious that Culpepper had made his commitment to Lee at some time before Tomlinson's departure and prior to the rank and file minister/members of the Church knowing of their plans to oust him.

Just as Tomlinson was starting over in the late summer of 1923, rebuilding his vision of the Church of God from scratch, so also, the work he had fostered in South Carolina was back to its infancy with no churches, few ministers, and only a scattered

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[32] J. W. Culpepper, "A Few Thoughts About the Work in General," *The Church of God Evangel*, August 25, 1923, 3.

handful of members. However, the picture was not as grim everywhere because some fields were ripe and the few laborers were busy reaping a new harvest.

During the period covering the next ten years, from 1923 to 33, the church experienced a tremendous season of revival. By 1933, membership totals had more than quadrupled to over 21,000. "In the April 28, 1934, issue of the White Wing Messenger it is stated that twenty-eight new local congregations were organized in a three-year period in the State of Oklahoma . . . This tremendous expansion of the Church, as in Oklahoma, was becoming the rule of the general Church."[33]

While Tomlinson and his loyal troopers experienced considerable success rebuilding the membership base in several states including Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina, Virginia, Georgia, Florida, Oklahoma and in the islands of the Bahamas over the next 12 years, South Carolina languished as little more than a mission state for the Church of God of A.J. Tomlinson.

With J.W. Culpepper's masterful control of South Carolina's desertion from Tomlinson, who could possibly take up the helm and pilot a new course? Obviously, no one in SC was prepared to rally the faithful few remaining Tomlinson loyalists. Even as King David who, while exiled in the caves of Adullam, built the nucleus of his army from the 'distressed', the 'indebted', and the 'discontented' (1 Sam. 22:2), Tomlinson had to be open to using whomever the Lord would provide. Subsequently, in 1923, Clancy C. Jones, self-described as "A Drunk, A Gambler, and A Rambler," became the first State Overseer of post-disruption era.

In an article published in the December 1923 *White Wing Messenger*, Jones recounted that, "On February 18, 1917 the dear Lord saved my soul from a life of sin

[33] Stone, *The Church,* 52.

and I was a drunkard, a gambler, a rambler and almost everything the devil wanted me to be, but I thank God I am happy in Jesus tonight."[34]

With Lee's cohorts fighting every attempt to reorganize with constant hostility, the primary job qualification for Tomlinson's new Palmetto State Overseer would be for a man who could stand in the furnace of extreme and constant opposition. Tough circumstances would call for a tough man and Jones was such a man. While nowhere near as eloquent as Culpepper, and certainly not a polished seminarian, Jones had prepared for his assignment with a stint in the U.S. Army, then later while sequestered in jail and a mental institution. He reported that during his time in the Army he "went through many hard things but . . . came out with victory."[35] Upon his release from the Army, he became acquainted with the Church of God and was eventually Sanctified and baptized with the Holy Ghost. According to Jones, "When I went back home . . . filled with the Holy Ghost and speaking in tongues my people thought I was crazy as they had never seen *any*one with the Holy Ghost."[36] Because of his "speaking in tongues" and other manifestations of the Spirit, he was put in jail for observation then later sent to "the insane asylum and put behind the bars for 60 long days."[37] He would later tell of several terrible beatings he endured during his time in the "insane asylum" that left injuries that would hinder him for many years.

Historically, U.S. Marine enlistees are sent to Parris Island, South Carolina where the heat is unbearable and the mosquitoes are larger than life. Those who

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[34] C.C. Jones, "I Was A Drunk, A Gambler And A Rambler," *The White Wing Messenger*, December 29, 1923, 4. Note: *The White Wing Messenger* became the official weekly magazine of the Church of God over which A. J. Tomlinson was General Overseer after the 1923 church split. The magazine remains the written voice of the Church of God of Prophecy to date.
[35] Jones, "I Was A Drunk, A Gambler And A Rambler," 4.
[36] Jones, "I Was A Drunk, A Gambler And A Rambler," 4.
[37] Jones, "I Was A Drunk, A Gambler And A Rambler," 4.

successfully endure the thirteen weeks crucible called basic training testify, "After you experience Parris Island, war is nothing." Similarly, Clancy Jones had been through the cauldron of his own 'basic training' and was now ready for the war. For two years this 'tough as nails' preacher fought valiantly in SC.

While few records survived of Jones' labors, there is nonetheless a report of a revival held in Columbia, SC – conducted in a borrowed Freewill Baptist Church in which 23 were saved.[38] Sister E.M. Horn reported that, "Brother Jones preached under the power and demonstration of the Holy Ghost. The house was full most every night and some turned away for lack of room."[39] In addition to the 23 who were saved, six testified of being sanctified,[40] and three received the Holy Ghost.

Jones was noted for demonstrating mighty manifestations of the Holy Spirit.[41] Such manifestations that had caused his imprisonment in his early years, now served to boost the faith of those attending the revival. "The sick were wonderfully helped up and several were healed. One sister was healed of a cancer on her face. It was completely well when the meeting closed. Another sister was healed of a stomach trouble."[42]

Jones was the first in the line of ministers who, while living in North Carolina operated as *missionary* Overseers to SC. While residing for much of his tenure in Clyde, NC he invested time and energies pursuing preaching opportunities in the south

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[38] E. M. Horn, "Baptist Church House Opens to State Overseer for Meeting," *The White Wing Messenger*, December 20, 1924, 3.
[39] Horn, "Baptist Church House Opens to State Overseer for Meeting," 3.
[40] The Church of God has traditionally embraced the Wesleyan doctrine of Sanctification, the second definite, instantaneous, and complete work of Grace.
[41] Jones had been known to 'handle' rattlesnakes in the mountains of NC under the power of the Spirit causing many to believe.
[42] Horn, "Baptist Church House Opens to State Overseer for Meeting," 3.

state. Exactly how he was connected to the small mill village community of Trough, presently known as Pacolet, is unclear, but during his term he reported revival involvement there. Jones related how he traveled from Canton, NC to Trough where he ran a revival in which nine souls were saved. The headline in the WWM celebrated a new church set in order.[43] Even though this church survived only a few years, its organization gave evidence of Jones' efforts in the area.

It appears that Jones centered his ministry in the small mill village communities of Spartanburg and Union counties. He even listed his mailing address in the Union County community of Buffalo, SC for a brief period of time. Since there was little to no funding for his ministry, it is possible that he secured some employment in the local cotton mills to support his family.

According to the Assembly Minutes, on Monday, September 15, 1924 Jones was one of four representatives from SC to attend the 19th Annual Assembly held in Cleveland, Tennessee.[44] That number increased to seven representatives in 1925.[45]

C. L. Taylor, who would serve as overseer of both Carolinas, succeeded Jones in 1925.[46] While also residing in the mountains of western NC, Taylor filled the position of mission Overseer for South Carolina in 1925 and again from 1927 through the Assembly of 1929. His tenure was interrupted briefly by the appointment of D. R. Holcomb who, although possibly organizing the Church at Calhoun Falls,[47] always

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[43] Clancey C. Jones, "Nine Are Saved in Few Nights Meeting – Happy Band Saints at Trough, S.C.," *The White Wing Messenger*, December 20, 1924, 3.
[44] Minutes, September 10-16, 1924, 19th Annual Assembly, 33.
[45] Minutes, September 9-1, 1925, 20th Annual Assembly, 4.
[46] *Minutes of Our Twentieth Annual Assembly of the Church over which A. J. Tomlinson is General Overseer* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1925), 44.
[47] Julia Woodall, "Six Find Jesus in Calhoun Falls Revival," *The White Wing Messenger*, May 8, 1926.

listed his home address in Ft. Myers, FL. It is more likely that a local Carolinian named E.F. Holcomb should be credited with conducting the Calhoun Falls revival since there is no other account of Overseer D.R. Holcomb ever ministering in SC. He may have been unable or unwilling to leave Florida and relocate to SC where there were few members and little to no support.[48]

For whatever reason Holcomb was replaced for a period of three months (May-July, 1927) by A.C. McKeown who served as Interim Overseer until Taylor was reinstated during the Assembly of 1927. McKeown appears to have been a local member from the North Charleston area who was called upon by Tomlinson to fill the position temporarily. This is somewhat confusing considering that there is no record of a church in Charleston during that time frame.

Upon review of C.L. Taylor's records, it is apparent that although he was an energetic and successful overseer, the greater preponderance of his energy was required in North Carolina with only cursory attention given to the south.[49] However, he did conduct the first State Convention held after the '23 split - convening in Pelzer, SC, April 5-8, 1928. His handwritten letter to A.J. Tomlinson dated March 16, 1928 describes the meager condition of the Pelzer Church at the time of this Convention: "I suppose it is all the place I know to have it. All though (*sic*) their place of worship is only a very small store building, some 24 by 30 . . . I don't expect the Convention to be very much as we don't have but a few members in South Carolina [*with*] only two preachers."[50]

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[48] Holcomb would later resurface as Overseer of Missouri and Minnesota.
[49] While C. L. Taylor served as Overseer South Carolina for only three years, he continued in the same post in North Carolina for 20 years.
[50] C.L. Taylor, letter to A.J. Tomlinson, March 16, 1928.

While serving both Carolinas, Taylor led representatives from each in review before the Annual Assembly of 1929. The relative size difference between the two states he oversaw was reflected in their corresponding number of representative: NC – fifty-two delegates; SC – only four.

R. M. Stover, another North Carolina pastor who would function as missionary Overseer, replaced Taylor in South Carolina at the Assembly of 1929.[51] Stover's loyalty to Tomlinson and the Church can be traced back to his ministry in Roanoke, VA in the early 1920s. Personal correspondence to Stover from Tomlinson shortly after the split of 1923 gives clear evidence of their close association.[52]

Not much is known of his work in South Carolina, other than his dependence on the *White Wing Messenger* to communicate with the ministers and members. However, a positive sign of progress during his supervision is inferred when at the end of his only year in office, 25 South Carolinians registered as attending the 25th General Assembly in 1930.[53]

Melvin Pittman of Manor, GA replaced Stover in 1930 but C.W. Chasteen, a local member from the Anderson, SC area, replaced him mid-year. It is unclear if Pittman accepted the assignment since no records substantiate any involvement in the state.

Chasteen is somewhat a mystery man. Shortly after J.A. West succeeded him at the General Assembly of 1931 he wrote Bishop Tomlinson a letter in which he described Chasteen as having, "confessed up, beg (sic) pardon, says he will do all he

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[51] *Minutes of Our 24th Annual Assembly of the Church over which A. J. Tomlinson is General Overseer*, (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1929), 54.
[52] A.J. Tomlinson, letter to R.M. Stover, October 3, 1923.
[53] *Minutes of Our 25th Annual Assembly of the Church over which A. J. Tomlinson is General Overseer*, (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1930), 6.

can for the church."[54] West continued, "He says we can count on him, Praise the Lord."[55] Tomlinson replied, "I am so happy about Brother Chasteen and I feel like he will make a good worker for us yet. I only wish he was not so handicapped for lack of means."[56] Reading between the lines it would seem that even though Chasteen had been trusted and allowed to serve as interim Overseer for a few months in the summer and early fall of 1931, he had suffered some setback that called for his restoration. Sadly, West's correspondence with Tomlinson would be the last mention of Chasteen in any church documents.

J. A. West accepted his appointment to SC at a time when the sheep were scattered, the ministry was in disarray, and confusion was the rule of the day (1931). In personal correspondences with Tomlinson, West listed a litany of problem congregations and errant clergy. Early on he told of attempts to restore the ministry of Brother Chasteen, and excessive debt problems of reverent E. F. Holcomb. However, most grievous was the account of minister James Shipman whose, "crime . . . was too bad to even talk about."[57]

Most of West's communication with Tomlinson detailed his attempts to locate ministers who had been displaced or who had lost fellowship with the church, and his efforts to settle various local church disputes. The necessary utilization of itinerant Overseers (those who live out of state and visited only occasionally) resulted in an unstable climate evidenced by an unreliable ministry.

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[54] J.A. West, letter to A.J. Tomlinson, November 16, 1931.
[55] J.A. West, letter to A.J. Tomlinson, November 16, 1931.
[56] A.J. Tomlinson, letter to J.A. West, November 17, 1931.
[57] J.A. West, letter to A.J. Tomlinson, November 16, 1931

Tomlinson encouraged West to stay in South Carolina as much as possible. He wrote, "I am delighted and happy because you were on your job and I feel sure that you will win and if you can just stay right there with the exception of running back up home a day or two occasionally."[58] While Tomlinson wrote to West in care of J. A. Quinn of Pelzer, SC it is likely that West retained his residence in the Eastern North Carolina town of Stedman. Later, in 1932 - 33, West listed his contact address as Hartsville, SC, which would have been closer to Steadman. In 1935, newly appointed Overseer, E. A. McDonald reported that while there were a couple of "sisters" who were members of the church at Hartsville, there was no functioning church nor pastor there. Possibly, West found a way to honor Tomlinson's request that he spend as much time as possible in South Carolina while at the same time staying closer to his NC home.

West resigned his South Carolina appointment in 1934 and would later request to be appointed as Overseer of a different state. Tomlinson addressed this matter in a June, 1936 correspondence, "I am sorry you feel like you made a mistake in giving up South Carolina, but I hope you will look forward instead of backward."[59] A clearer picture of West's personal challenges were revealed as Tomlinson's letter continued, "I note what you say, also, about offering yourself for the work of state overseer . . . I thank you very much, and yet I am just like I have been for a good while, I can hardly see how you can leave home very far."[60]

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[58] A.J. Tomlinson, letter to J.A. West, November 5, 1931.
[59] A.J. Tomlinson, letter to J.A. West, June 26, 1936.
[60] A.J. Tomlinson, letter to J.A. West, June 26, 1936.

West, like C. L. Taylor before him, had been successful in organizing churches in North Carolina before being sent to SC.[61] Tomlinson obviously looked to such men in hopes that they could be equally successful in planting new churches in South Carolina. In this tradition, John B. Sears, after successfully organizing a new North Carolina church in April 1934[62] was summarily appointed as State Overseer for South Carolina later that fall.

There is no trace of activity, correspondence, or residents related to the ministry of John Sears in South Carolina. The only mention of Sears during that year was a notice in the White Wing Messenger requesting address information for him. It appears he had, for all intents and purposes, dropped off the face of the earth or at least had become unavailable to Tomlinson, and more importantly, to those he had been given oversight.

While the history of South Carolina is most reliably traced through the records of the State Overseers, these men came and went with predictable regularity during the dozen years after the split of 1923. Although less is known about the indigenous ministers and members of South Carolina, who lived and worked amidst the textile villages and tenant farms of the Palmetto State, it was those brave warriors who dug their toes deep in the dark red Carolina clay to maintain a foothold for Tomlinson and the Church during these desperate years.

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[61] Information courtesy of NC Church of God of Prophecy State Archives, accessed October 8, 2012.

[62] Information courtesy of NC Church of God of Prophecy State Archives, accessed October 8, 2012.

Table 1: State Overseers of South Carolina

STATE OVERSEER OF SOUTH CAROLINA 1923-35
AND THEIR LISTED ADDRESSES:

STATE OVERSEER Year Appointed		LISTED MAILING ADDRESS	White Wing Messenger Edition[63] When The Address Was Published
1923	C. C. Jones	Clyde, NC	12/19/1923
1924	C. C. Jones	Buffalo, SC	11/22/1924
1925	C. L. Taylor	WWM, Cleveland, TN	11/21/25
(Over both: NC & SC)		Canton, NC	1/16/1926
1926	D. R. Holcomb	Ft. Myers, FL*	11/20/1926
**	A. C. McKeown	N. Charleston, SC	4/23/1927 -- 7/2/27
1927	C. L. Taylor	Biltmore, NC	7/16/1927
1928	C. L. Taylor	Biltmore, NC	1/7/1928
1929	R. M. Stover	Gastonia, NC	9/28/1929
		Pelzer, SC	
1930	Melvin Pittman	Manor, GA	10/11/1930
		Pelzer, SC	10/25/1930
***	C. W. Chasteen,	Anderson, SC	7/4/1931
1931	J. A. West	Stedman, NC	2/13/1932
1932	J. A. West	Hartsville, SC	12/31/1932
1933	J. A. West	Hartsville, SC	5/6/1933
1934	John B. Sears ****		
1935	E. A. McDonald		10/12/1935

*In all personal correspondence and WWM D. R. Holcomb reported his address in Fort Myers, FL. (WWM 11/20/26; 12/18/26; 1/29/27)
** A. C. McKeown must have been an interim appointment as there is no indication that D. R. Holcomb ever relocated to SC.
*** Chasteen, most likely, was a mid-term or interim appointee.
**** In a1934 WWM entitled "Your Overseer Writes - South Carolina Greetings", E. A. McDonald said he was looking for address or information regarding J. B. Sears.

A few churches sprang up and reported progress through the White Wing Messenger, but without taking deep roots they soon withered away. In combination with the financial calamities produced by the Great Depression of the 1920s, the much stronger

[63] The Church's official magazine, *The White Wing Messenger*, listed contact information for the appointed State Overseers each month during this period. These remain the only reliable record to date.

Flavius J. Lee group opposed every effort to establish a new congregation. Zura Ford related that, "We have the devil still in Pelzer, S. C." but added, "pray that we will keep him stirred."[64]

There were reports of victorious revivals in Columbia, South Carolina during the mid-1920s. The aforementioned revival that C. C. Jones conducted had lasted eighteen days. But, with no building in which to conduct meetings and/or to sustain growth, the Columbia group's only recourse was to meet in a borrowed Freewill Baptist Church.[65] While such revival reports were inspiring and seem to indicate the existence of a local congregation, this group would cease to exist relatively quickly.

After a revival at Trough, South Carolina in which nine were saved Overseer C. C. Jones reported, "We set a Church of God in order with 11 members."[66] While Jones reported that, "The house was so full . . . I hardly had room to run and preach like I would like to have" and, "many are looking this way"[67] there is no indication that this church survived more than a few months.

Julia Woodall operated a "new field" work with Sister Leona Montgomery in Calhoun Falls.[68] In a February 1926 revival six were saved, four sanctified, one received the Holy Ghost and one was reclaimed. Woodall recounted that "Brother Holcomb set the Church in order with six members and one came in later."[69] This would make Calhoun Falls possibly the oldest church to align with Tomlinson after the disruption of 1923. Others associated with the Calhoun Falls church included N.M. and Robin Hilley, and

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[64] Source: The Church of God of Prophecy Archives Cleveland, TN.
[65] Source: The Church of God of Prophecy Archives Cleveland, TN.
[66] Source: The Church of God of Prophecy Archives Cleveland, TN.
[67] Source: The Church of God of Prophecy Archives Cleveland, TN.
[68] Source: The Church of God of Prophecy Archives Cleveland, TN.
[69] Julia Woodal, "Revival Fire In SC," *The White Wing Messenger*, May 8, 1926.

Mattie Cannon. Sadly, in March 1929 Cannon would write, "I do not get to attend any Church of God services as we have no one to preach for us."[70]

Willie G. Rogers of Dillion (sic), South Carolina reported that "Brother B.F. Brown . . . Preached here a week and on Sunday, October 2nd, he set the Church of God in order with five members."[71] This church also did not survive as Rogers reported in the same article, "This place is a very hard one - so many false reports have been sent out . . . We do not intend to be misled anymore."[72] Frequently, reports of extreme opposition accompanied most testimonials of revival success.

Mary Jane Gore of Dylan, H. V. Hunter of Easley, Alice Myers of Aiken, and Anderson Miller of Leesville, South Carolina sent testimonials to the WWM. However there was no record of churches functioning in those cities. Likewise, in stirring testimonials, John Colquitt, Sylvester Douglas, and O. W. Lee listed their addresses in Charleston, South Carolina. Douglas even expressed gratitude for a T.F. Yount because he "brought the Word of God that led me in this holy way."[73] Just like the others, there is no verifiable evidence of a Church existing in Charleston during those desolate years.

Thus, after the church disruption of mid-summer 1923, A. J. Tomlinson was compelled to disassociate from many who had previously formed his inner circle. at the age of 58 Tomlinson started over, retaining only a small fraction of those who had affiliated with the Church of God. In South Carolina the next 12 years would lead to a frantic fight for survival among those loyal to Tomlinson. When Tomlinson presided over the General Assembly of 1935 there were only six struggling congregations functioning as

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[70] Mattie Cannon, "No One to Preach Here" *The White Wing Messenger*, March 23, 1929.
[71] Source: The Church of God of Prophecy Archives Cleveland, TN.
[72] Source: The Church of God of Prophecy Archives Cleveland, TN.
[73] Source: The Church of God of Prophecy Archives Cleveland, TN.

part of the South Carolina church body. They consisted of vacant store front buildings in Greenville (Roy Reeves, Pastor), Piedmont (Jennie Jordan, Willie and Edna Tinsley, and Roy Prince carried on the work), and Anderson (J.B. Horton, pastor); a church operating in a home in Darlington (deacon Edson Evans, pastor), and a few scattered members in Pelzer who were left without a pastor but met occasionally in the home or Loss Jordan or Zula Ford.[74]

The church at Calhoun Falls met in a small frame building (Inez Cannon, pastor). It was the only congregation meeting in a structure other than a storefront or a member's home.[75] However, this building was only dried in and the property did not belong to the Church.[76]

Indeed, if the Church were to survive, much less thrive, it was time for a dynamic man of vision and passion to come; a man with the same vision as A. J. Tomlinson and empowered by the Spirit of God with a Holy passion for the work and people of South Carolina. But, after so many years of struggle, where would Tomlinson find such a man if indeed one did indeed exist?

The revival spirit that was exploding in other states lay dormant in South Carolina, awaiting an anointed leader. As the General Assembly of 1935 approached, just such a man was rising on the horizon.

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[74] There may have also been one or two members (Sister Maree and Ethel Walters) in Hartsville, but no recognized congregation existed. They met occasionally only when a minister would visit.
[75] Shepard and & Shepard, *My Adventures With God*, 56.
[76] Fred S. Fisher, Interview by author, Lancaster, SC, August 23, 2012. Bishop Fred Fisher, former General Overseer of the Church of God of Prophecy, reported that in 1935 the Tomlinson branch of the church owned no property in SC.

CHAPTER 5. THE YEARS OF RAPID EXPANSIONISM

One person with passion is better than forty people merely interested.

–E. M. Forster

At the General Assembly of 1928 A. J. Tomlinson introduced "THE BIG BUSINESS PROGRAM" of the Church of God. During his annual address he proclaimed, "Before the break came in the Church five years ago I was making an effort to prepare plans whereby we could spread our Church work at a more rapid rate, and make the people of every state and nation feel the pressure of influence then going forth in mighty waves. These plans were never mature because I was forced into other channels in order to save some of the results of the labor that had been carried on under severe privations and difficulties."[1]

As the nation plunged deeper into the Great Depression, Tomlinson marched forward relentlessly with new directives for the Church in order to fulfill his long-standing vision of reaching the entire world with the full Gospel message. Following his lead, the Assembled Church initiated new auxiliary programs including: The Assembly Band Movement in which each local church membership would be divided in small groups of 6 to 12 members with a leader taking oversight of each of these small bands. Many years later progressive churches would discover the small group ministry concept that Tomlinson envisioned as far back as 1916 and codified in the Big Business Program of 1928.

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[1] A J. Tomlinson, *The Church of God Movement Heritage Series*, vol. 3, *General Assembly Annual Addresses, 1928-1943* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing, 2011, 2012), 30-31.

Also introduced as part of this new agenda were such things as the State Overseers Pay Association (SOPA), devised to set up a systematic means for funding the office of the State Overseer.[2] Women's Missionary Bands (WMB) were established, "to stimulate and solicit missionary funds, clothing, etc., for Home and Foreign Missions."[3] The youth auxiliary of the Church, the Victory Leaders Bands, (VLB) were to be organized in every local church in which youth gatherings would be, "a kind of training school for the young, so they may be trained in the work of the church and at the same time keep up their spirituality."[4] These auxiliaries would operate hand-in-hand with the existing Sunday schools, Publishing ventures, and Orphanage enterprises. (In his Annual Address of 1928, Tomlinson referenced the "new orphanage at Dyersburg, Tennessee."[5])

Convinced that every nation needs a banner for corporate unity and identification, in 1933 Tomlinson suggested, "a flag specially designed and prepared for the Church of God."[6] The rapidly growing legion of foot soldiers readily embraced the concept and rallied behind Tomlinson who hoisted the 'Banner of Love' the 'Standard of the Great Church of God.'[7] Thus, the Church of God marched victoriously like a Mighty Army. So typical was this theme of moving forward like an Army with banners, that for many years the annual assemblies would be distinguished

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[2] Davidson, *Upon This Rock*, 313.
[3] Davidson, *Upon This Rock*, 314.
[4] Tomlinson, *The Church of God Movement Heritage Series*, 68.
[5] Tomlinson, *The Church of God Movement Heritage Series*, 18. In his annual address of 1928, Tomlinson referenced the "new orphanage at Dyersburg, Tennessee." Going back to the turn of the century in the mountains of Western North Carolina, Tomlinson had always maintained an interest in the care of orphans.
[6] Tomlinson, *The Church of God Movement Heritage Series*, 159.
[7] Clemmie P. McAnally, *The Banner of Love* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1945), 6.

by various groups parading or marching through the streets of Cleveland, Tennessee, with bands playing and banners waving. A sense of national identity (God's Holy Nation) was pervasive throughout the Church as the All Nations Flag was seen, not only displayed in every church building, but also as stickers on car windows and in most members' homes.

The prevailing enthusiasm for the advancement of the work of the church and the spreading of the gospel resulted in massive numerical growth in most southern states. However, this was not the case in South Carolina. An active Sunday School was the most reliable identifier of a functioning congregation. In the years 1934–35 Georgia had 31 Churches operating Sunday Schools, Kentucky 36, North Carolina 40, Virginia 36, Florida 28, and Tennessee 48. Conversely, South Carolina remained the "weak sister" of the South with only six Sunday Schools.[8] This accurately represented the number of feeble churches essentially living on life support, struggling to stay afloat. If there was to be hope for a more prosperous future, the times demanded an infusion of energetic, and dedicated leadership.

It has been said that dynamite comes in small packages and this is indeed the best way to described Eustice Austin McDonald. It would soon become evident that the '*dynamis*' or dynamite power of God was packed into his diminutive frame.[9]

The task he would be assigned in 1935 was daunting; nevertheless, God had carefully prepared him for this assignment. Raised on South Georgia farms he had learned to trust God for every season of harvest. Difficult times only served to

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[8] *Minutes of Our 30th Annual Assembly of the Church over which A. J. Tomlinson is General Overseer* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1935), 33-4.

[9] E. A. McDonald stood only a little over five feet tall, and while "farm boy" strong, he would never be mistaken for a body builder.

strengthen his resolve and make him more determined than ever to succeed at whatever he attempted. Hardships of the Great Depression taught him to use all of his God given wit and wisdom to scratch out a living for himself and his young family, whether on the farm, or employed in local factories. When times were at their worse, he resorted to hunting alligators that populated the bucolic Georgia ponds, selling their hides for the tidy sum of two dollars each, doing whatever it took to keep food on the table.[10]

However, the Lord had not called him to farm or catch alligators, He called him to preach the Gospel and would accept nothing else. On multiple occasions God brought him to the brink of catastrophe, refusing to release him from his calling. Finally, fully surrendering and accepting the call to pastoral duty, E. A. McDonald entered the ministry, experiencing accumulative success in South Georgia towns such as Warsaw, where he organized a new church, Waycross, Brunswick, Axon, and Wilsonville.[11] While significant in their own rite, these experiences served as preparation for the new and challenging assignment looming in his future.

Saying that he was *appointed* as State Overseer of South Carolina does not paint an entirely accurate picture. In September 1935, this 29-year-old pastor and District Overseer was one of the 205 delegates who accompanied Georgia Overseer, M.E. Wilson, in victorious procession during the Assembly meeting in Cleveland, TN.[12] While there, McDonald saw a sign posted outside of the newly enlarged

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[10] Shepard and Shepard, *My Adventures With God* (Greenville, SC: Southern Historical Press. 1997), 33.
[11] For more insight into those early years of ministry see Shepard and Shepard, *My Adventures With God* (Greenville, SC: Southern Historical Press. 1997).
[12] *Minutes of Our 30th Annual Assembly of the Church over which A. J. Tomlinson is General Overseer* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1935), 12.

Tabernacle "asking for ministers who would volunteer to go into states where there was little or no church work established."[13] South Carolina was one of the States listed.

"The next morning he approached the General Overseer, A. J. Tomlinson, and asked if he had found a volunteer for South Carolina. Tomlinson asked, 'Why? Are you interested in going? Would you be willing to move there?'"[14] McDonald answered that he would and, with that, the brief conversation ended.

Although this was only a casual chat, at the conclusion of the Assembly E.A. McDonald was commissioned as Overseer of South Carolina with the understanding that he would relocate to the state. Immediately thereafter, he attacked his new challenge with boundless vigor.

His arrival in October of 1935 ushered in a new era of rapid growth and expansionism for the Church of God [of Prophecy][15] that would continue for over 40 years.[16] Hitting the ground running, he quickly made contact with every minister and congregation, confirming the brethren, getting a feel of the land, and acquainting himself with the people.

McDonald's oldest daughter, Eufaula, was almost 10 years old when she joined her father for his first tour of the churches. According to her personal recollections, along with the few surviving records, the situation among the churches was as follows:

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[13] Shepard and Shepard, *My Adventures With God*, 48.
[14] Shepard and Shepard, *My Adventures With God*, 48.
[15] For 30 years following the church split of 1923 both *Church of God* branches claimed the name until a 1953 court decision added "of Prophecy" as a legal identifier to the Tomlinson led body.
[16] McDonald served as Overseer in SC for 25 years. However, subsequent Overseers who would follow him continued to promote revival and Church plantings into the 1970s and 80s.

- In Greenville services were being held in a vacant store building. Roy Reeves was serving as pastor.
- In Piedmont services were being held in a store building; Roy Prince and others filling in as pastor.
- In Pelzer the work was not functioning. There was no pastor and the few members were scattered.
- In Anderson services were held in a vacant store building. J. B. Horton was serving as pastor.
- In Calhoun Falls a small building had been dried–in. Inez Cannon was serving as pastor.
- In Darlington Sunday School was being held in the home of Marie Odom, but without a pastor.
- In Hartsville the work was not functioning. There was no pastor, but occasional services were held in the home of a Sister Maree.[17]

Remarkably, McDonald organized a new Church plant in Charleston during his first month in the state.[18]

In the existing congregations the fire of God was not completely quenched, but the coals seemed dead and grey. McDonald, a man for his time, began to stir up the ashes and found in every location the underlying remnants of fire. His passion and vision were contagious. Energized by a renewed wind of the Spirit, the rekindled flame

[17] Shepard and Shepard, *My Adventures With God*, 56.
[18] McDonald had an old friend and extended family member from Georgia named Calvin Wilson. Wilson, who was now living in Charleston had purchased and was living in a Tabernacle building. McDonald preached to a small group of Christians and immediately organized a new church (Shepard and Shepard, *My Adventures With God*, 54).

blazed, as in quick order, new churches were organized in all regions of the state and willing, anointed ministers began to surface from both inside and outside the Church body.

Over the succeeding twenty-five years under McDonald's anointed leadership Spiritual warriors were identified and raised up. These were champions of the faith with tremendous zeal for God, and the Church of God! By the time McDonald left SC in 1960[19] the work had grown from six struggling, infant churches to a total of eighty-three,[20] from a small hand full of itinerant ministers to a total of 161.[21] "E. A. McDonald, Sr. licensed approximately 261 Evangelists and 20 Bishops while in South Carolina."[22]

The revival and church-planting spirit that had been existent in other southern states now became endemic in SC. Essentially, every sermon preached included a call to "win the lost" and advance the great Church of God. One such appeal was giving by McDonald in his Annual Address of the 1954 State Convention. He said, "Let's everybody become stirred about the ripe fields that need reapers. I want to encourage our faithful pastors to offer some assistance in the new fields." McDonald continued, "every full time pastor, with the cooperation of his workers *to* launch at least one revival in some new field near them, either in a tent, cottage, open air, rented building,

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[19] In 1960 McDonald was appointed to serve as State Overseer of Alabama. In 1964 he was given duty as General Superintendent of Tomlinson Home for Children (orphanage). His last appointed assignment was as General Chairman of the Ministerial Aid Department where he served from 1967 until his retirement in 1970.

[20] Shepard and Shepard, *My Adventures With God,* 211.

[21] Shepard and Shepard, *My Adventures With God,* 212.

[22] Shepard and Shepard, *My Adventures With God,* 217.

or whatever is available." His assumption was that, "Any effort will prove some success and possible a new church."[23]

As the small group of churches McDonald inherited in 1935 flowered like the crown of a dandelion, this young cyclone from South Georgia caused fresh gusts of zeal to spread the ripening seed of the Church of God message rapidly across the fertile Carolina soil. His remarkable enthusiasm was infectious, magnetically attracting energetic young champions to align with him and his cause. He was a proven church planter and his invigorated followers emulated him. They covered the state, organizing churches that functioned as the nucleus or hub centers from which accompanying "spokes" branched out in many directions. The tide was turning and a new day was dawning for the Church of God in South Carolina.

In later reflection, McDonald would rehearse the events of those early years. He said, "I looked all over the State to find every worker that could be located anywhere in South Carolina, both members and friends."[24] However, there were precious few ministers to be found. He recalled, "at that time there were only about eight that were licensed [*and*] in good standing and some of them were very badly discouraged . . . I realized that we had a battle to fight to survive and overcome the great opposition that was against us and the minister that could be depended on then was worth his weight in gold."[25] Consequently, McDonald's plan was to mobilize, "every fit man and woman and organize for a forward march to victory."[26] The clear reality was, "We had no property in the State, no church buildings . . . We worshiped in homes of members and friends, store

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[23] Shepard and Shepard, *My Adventures With God,* 190.
[24] Excerpts taken from McDonald's Annual Address to the 1956 State Convention held at the West Greenville, SC church, July 3-8, 1956, as recorded by Shepard and Shepard, 199.
[25] Shepard and Shepard, *My Adventures With God*, 199.
[26] Shepard and Shepard, *My Adventures With God*, 199.

buildings and in the open air and no shelter over our heads. We had no money, few friends, but a great big God that owns all that we needed. We trusted in him to pilot us through to victory and He did!"[27]

Even though he was intimately involved in the process, he could not fully explain the amazing growth the State experienced during his tenure. He said, "it was like searching out a proposal to find success, or the things that would make success and we found it by the inspiring spirit of God working with us. Often when we could see nothing but defeat, He led us through to our own surprise, gave us much more than we expected."[28]

PEOPLE, PLACES, AND PASSION!

Spiritual giants such as John E. Evans, J. V. Galloway, Allard Flowers, Roy Reeves, Connie Payne, E.V. Cobb, Lloyd Harvey, Manuel Totherow, May Gossett, Henry Johnson, Hazel Dyer, Fred Fisher, T.C. Parker, Henry Lamb, R.D. Beasley,[29] and others embodied the core of Daniel 11:32, "but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits" (KJV).

Additionally, key churches emerged as anchor centers for growth and expansion in the various regions of the state such as: Charleston in the southern coastal region; Moselle in the Low County;[30] Darlington and Camp Branch in the Pee-Dee region; Lancaster in the north central and Midlands regions; as well as churches

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[27] Shepard and Shepard, *My Adventures With God*, 199.
[28] Shepard and Shepard, *My Adventures with God*, 199.
[29] As with any such list, there are obvious omissions, great warriors that have been overlooked, though not on purpose. See a more comprehensive list in the appendices.
[30] Moselle was little more than a crossroad community located in the rural farmlands of Southern Colleton County. Bordering the swamplands adjacent the Salkehatchie River, Moselle served as the staging ground for McDonald's labors in the Low Country Coastal region. Churches planted in Walterboro, Nixville, Grays, and Ruffin can be traced back to Moselle.

significantly sited in West Greenville, Pendleton, and Anderson in the Piedmont region.

Thinkers and philosophers have endlessly expounded theories addressing the notion of "change." An often-quoted translation of the sagacity of the ancient Greek, Heraclitus, states, "There is nothing permanent except change."[31] The rural South, at the advent of the 20th century, was the embodiment of this concept of incessant change with the evolutionary transformations affecting traditional Southern culture and the socio-economic structure. Additionally, the Holiness/Pentecostal movement was gaining a foothold in the red Carolina clay amidst tremendous opposition from the established mainline churches. Perhaps, nothing shook up the ecumenical status- quo of the twentieth century more than the released power of the Pentecostal movement.

At the same time the South continued its struggle to recover from the crippling effects of the Civil War. Determined efforts were being made to stimulate Southern industrialization. Historically, southern farmers raised cotton crops that were straightway sent North for processing. But, initiatives such as the New South Cotton Mill Campaign (1865-1901) and other such strategies were designed to transform the Southern economy. The resulting industrialization triggered a gradual, yet massive exodus as thousands of families migrated from growing cotton on small family farms to processing that same cotton into cloth in large mechanized textile mills. According to historian Walter Edgar, between 1945 and 1974 the number of individual farms fell from 142,000 to 32,000 in South Carolina.[32]

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[31] This idiom may be an adaptation of Heraclitus': "No man ever steps in the same river twice, for he is not the same man and it is not the same river."

[32] Walter Edgar, *South Carolina, A History*, (Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 532.

The expansion of the Church of God during the McDonald era was occurring during this time when the deep South was transitioning from an agrarian society to the slightly less poverty ridden existence birthed by the proliferation of the southern textile industry. The majority of churches organized during McDonald's era were comprised primarily of these struggling farmers and mill village workers.

Victoria Morris Byerly painted a revealing picture of the migration occurring at the turn of the 20th Century: "Cotton mills were in operation throughout the south, but concentrated in the Piedmont region . . . Southern entrepreneurs were most interested in hiring women and children, the cheapest laborers, freeing the man of the household to continue farming. In addition, mill houses --- plain white clapboard houses with indoor kitchens, up to five or six rooms, and electric lights could be rented on the grounds of the mill for a few dollars a month. This opportunity was attractive to people who had been living in one- or two-room homes without plumbing or electricity."[33]

A remarkable character study reflecting both the era and the people who were attracted to the Church of God message comes from examining the life of one Vergia Starnes. Born in 1891, Vergia's life was at the same time typical, yet remarkably atypical. It was typical inasmuch as she was uneducated, oppressively poor as poor as the dirt that oozed between her toes on the rural farms where she grew up working with her family as common laborers. Her personal pilgrimage would be limited, as she never grew far from her roots. From her early beginnings as a farm hand, she would transition only slightly after marriage to a sharecropper's farm. Her final days were spent residing in rented mill village houses. The common thread of her journey is

[33] Victoria Morris Byerly, *Hard Times Cotton Mill Girls: Personal Histories of Womanhood and Poverty in the South* (Ithaca, N.Y.: ILR Press, New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University, 1986), 11-12.

the realization that she never owned anything other than the clothes on her back and few ancillary homemaking possessions.

Being a farm worker, Vergia was positioned about as low on the social and economic totem pole as humanly possible. She, most likely would have worked as a "day laborer" earning only a beggar's pittance based on the amount of cotton she could pick or tobacco she could crop. The US Census taken in 1900 identified her entire family as "farm laborers." All were also listed as being unable to read or write, but could speak English.[34] Those educational limitations would have been typical of most field hands in the post Civil War rural south.

What makes Vergia's story extraordinarily atypical is documented in the same 1900 Census. Her mother, Martha Starnes, was born in 1854, pre-Civil War, and had been, on at least one occasion, registered as a domestic servant. By the taking of the initial Census of the century Martha was listed as mother of four children: Mary (age 17); Mattie (age 15); Walter (age 12) and Vergia (age 9).[35] Remarkably, a closer study of the Census reveals an unusual historical twist. While she and her brother Walter were identified racially as "White," her sisters Mary and Mattie were listed as "Black." Additionally, in the later Census conducted in 1920 Vergia's mother's racial distinction was amended to "Mulatto."[36]

One's mind could practically explode trying to comprehend the environment, societal pressure, economic hardship, and constant shame that accompanied a pre-teen girl who was raised in a multi-racial home by a mixed race mother during the first

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[34] United States Census, 1900

[35] "Family Search.org: Martha Starnes, 'United States Census, 1900'," accessed August 29, 2013, https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/MS13-14V.

[36] "Family Search.org: Martha Starnes, 'United States Census, 1920'," accessed August 29, 2013, https:// https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/MZJ4-8PS.

generation post Civil War. Additionally, her mother, Martha bore the stigma of being a single mother who had given birth to at least four children "out of wedlock."

Economically, as the head of the home, how did Martha provide for her family? Not many particulars are known of Martha's travails. However, in a November 1999 *Life Magazine* article, Stephanie Coontz addressed the survival challenges of the poor, unmarried woman of the era reporting that "Women couldn't vote, and their wages were so low that many turned to prostitution."[37] While there is no concrete evidence of such regarding Martha Starnes, the possibility can not be summarily rejected. The reality of her dire existence is irrefutable. The only life that Vergia, a diminutive Southern girl knew, was the daily existence of being looked down on, even by the poorest people of Union County.

If Vergia could afford to go to school, it is likely that no school in the rural South would have admitted her. Should she have desired to attend church, where would she be welcomed? And, if school or church were an option, she likely had nothing suitable to wear – no dress, no shoes, and no ribbons or bows for her naturally coarse, dark hair.[38] Obviously, her days were filled with hunger, physical depravity, wretched poverty, name-calling, vulgar innuendo, and all the fears and uncertainties that would accompany such a lot in life. What hope could a child born into such an environment possibly have, and where could she find a new beginning? Would her life ever find meaning beyond the "loser's hand" she had been dealt early in life?

In 1911 Vergia married Walter Edison Baker of Chesterfield County, South Carolina. She would give birth the 13 children, 11 of whom lived to adulthood.

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[37] Stephanie Coontz "The American Family," Stephaniecoontz.com, March 17, 2014, accessed March 17, 2014, http://www.stephaniecoontz.com/articles/article10.htm.
[38] Today, her hair would be described as "Afro-textured."

Walter, with the help of five strong sons, became an expert farmer. But, despite his best efforts he was never able to progress beyond the status of sharecropping.[39] There were times when he tried to purchase his own land, but bad crops always derailed those efforts, or even worse, crooked business associates.

Consequently, by 1938 the Baker's were farming a section of land bordering Highway #9 between Lancaster and Pageland, SC. There were actually two families that worked together on this particular farm. The Bakers and an unknown black family worked hand-in-hand to eke out a living from the dirt they had no hope of ever owning. There was not much difference between these sharecroppers and their predecessors, the slaves that had been emancipated only a few years earlier. They were at the rock bottom of the economic and social hierarchy.

The relationship between the sharecropper and the landowners whose property they worked, was explained by James Agee who said, "It is . . . safe to say that he [*the landowner*] thinks of his tenants, white or black, neither exactly as he would think of human beings nor exactly as he would think of his mules: he just thinks of them as tenants, and thus treats them, and thus demands that they act and treat themselves."[40] In 1941 Agee interviewed one such landowner who expressed his feelings about all tenants, "They are every one of them ignorant, they are most of them shiftless, and

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[39] Sharecroppers and tenant farmers are two farming classes that are often mistakenly lumped into one socio-economic group. While neither group owned the land they farmed, the tenant farmer was somewhat better off than the sharecropper. Charles C. Bolton noted that "Tenant farmers, in addition to having some cash to pay rent, also generally owned some livestock and tools needed for successful farming. Sharecroppers, on the other hand, were even more impoverished than tenant farmers. With few resources and little or no cash, sharecroppers agreed to farm a certain plot of land in exchange for a share of the crops they raised." See: Charles C. Bolton, "Farmers Without Land: The Plight of White Tenant Farmers and Sharecroppers," Mississippi History Now, March 14, 2014, accessed March 14, 2014, http://mshistory.k12.ms.us/index.php?id=228.

[40] James Agee, *Cotton Tenants: Three Families* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2013), 216.

they are nearly all of them improvident."[41] His disdain is further revealed when he says, "There's not one in any hundred who could run his own farm, unsupervised, into anything but ruin."[42] Additionally, in the Post Civil War rural South most landowners had more respect for their black tenants than for lower class whites. Such was the status of the Baker family of the 1930s.

Then, on one particularly eventful day in 1938, a stranger walked to the front door of the shanty house the Bakers called home. B.H. Petty was a Church of God preacher from Georgia whom Overseer McDonald persuaded to move to South Carolina and plant churches. He proceeded to go from door to door looking for a place to hold meetings. When he knocked on the door of the sharecropper's shack he was greeted with a welcome and permission to construct a "brush arbor" along the roadside of Hwy 9. The Church of God brush arbor began with the two tenant families serving as preacher Petty's congregation as a black family and a white one worshipping side by side. At this time, the Bakers were attending the Mt. Zion Baptist Church nearby, but they gladly received the Church of God message of Holiness and Pentecost delivered by Petty. Consequently, the first Church of God in the north-central region of the state was organized on that itinerate farm under the shade of the old-fashioned brush arbor.

Zechariah asked, "who hath despised the day of small things?" (Zec. 4:10). No 'thing' could have been 'smaller' than the genesis of this sharecropper's church planted in the brush arbor cathedral. Soon, both the Baker family, and the little church moved into the town of Lancaster, a mill village whose life sprang from the Leroy

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[41] Agee, *Cotton Tenants*, 217.
[42] Agee, *Cotton Tenants*, 217.

Springs textile factories. After initially conducting home meetings, a small storefront building was rented for use on Chesterfield Avenue.[43]

The storefront building filled up quickly as revival fires burned feverously. The opened windows not only allowed fresh air in but the sounds of signing and shouting out. Curious onlookers gathered outside, peering through every opening at the animated gyrations and otherworldly commotions going on inside, and what a sight to see. There were worshippers singing at the top of the lungs, preachers exhorting in like manner, saints dancing almost uncontrollably in the Spirit while speaking in tongues, and the sick being prayed for with many claims of healing.

It was not uncommon for a parishioner such as Vergia Starnes Baker to "shout" over to the potbelly stove, wrap her arms around the glowing hot metal and hold them there for 30 seconds or longer. When she would release her grip, her arms would not be burned or even red from exposure to the extreme heat. On other occasions one of the saints would open the door of the stove and take our flaming-hot live coals and dance around the room openly displaying the embers for all to see.[44] While this may seem remarkably unusual in our day, they viewed it not so much as a test of faith, but as a confirmation that the same God that was with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the Babylonian furnace was with them to deliver from their fiery trials. While many outsiders viewed such demonstrations with disdain, others moved inside to join the rapidly increasing body of believers.

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[43] This storefront location was used until J.V. Galloway and volunteers erected a new church building on Elms St. circa 1943.

[44] Eyewitness account given by Jessie Dean Hunter. Interviewed by author, Lancaster, SC, June 4, 2012.

In only a handful of years an amazing number of ministers were recognized or commissioned from this small storefront church. The list would include: Perry Barrett; Gaford Baker; Dora Lee Stewart;[45] Mildred Baker; Amy Funderburk; Geneva Cassidy; Essie May Mimms; E.L. Ammons; Dorothy Ammons; James Morrell; Willie Mae Todd; Rayford Gunn; Thomas Tillman; Mary Tillman; Robert McDowell; Gertrude McDowell; and Frank Bourne. In subsequent years this tradition continued as Sarah Tillman Steen, Wade Hunter, Howard Steen, Roger Knight, Rubén Hunter, Charles Whitman, and Kenneth Baker were all commissioned and/or licensed as ministers from the Lancaster congregation.

There were countless non-licensed preachers including Vergia Starnes Baker and Maggie Pressley. While these ladies were never officially certified or commissioned they preached many revival and home prayer meeting services and helped keep the doors of the church open by a practice commonly known as "soliciting." Soliciting in their generation was the process where the older ladies of the church would go through the community, entering businesses with a tambourine or offering pan in their hands. Upon identifying themselves they would ask all present for a donation to help the church. It has been reported that the more motherly the solicitor appeared, the more success she would have when boldly going into places where young men would never want to see their mothers or grandmothers. Thus, they enjoyed their greatest success in pool halls and beer joints where money would be given in an effort to get them out the door as quickly as possible. Those saintly older

[45] From the earliest days of its inception the Church of God of Prophecy licensed women as "Female Evangelist," some even serving in pastoral positions dating back to the 1920s.

women had absolutely no qualms entering such establishments, and it was these "begging" efforts that kept the light on, the rent paid, and the church doors open.

There is one other noteworthy minister that came out of Lancaster, although he was not originally licensed there. It was during those early years in the storefront building when a couple of teenage boys, Perry Barrett and John B. Murphy, would stand on the outside and watch the services through open windows. These boys were fascinated by everything they saw going on inside. Their youthful curiosity magnetically drew them to the back row and Holy Spirit conviction did the rest. Soon both claimed Salvation, Sanctification, and spoke in tongues as evidence of Holy Ghost baptism.

While Perry Barrett remained in the area and became involved in the ministry, John Murphy would soon move with his family to North Carolina. Years later he approached this author and introduced himself as a descendent of that storefront church whom he thought "no one would remember." After leaving Lancaster, he became active in the church in North Carolina where he was licensed as a minister. He became a successful pastor, eventually transitioning to multiple states, serving many years as a State Overseer. Throughout all of his travels he never forgot his early emersion into the experience of Pentecost and his initiation in the Church of God that began when he was on the outside looking in.

Lancaster became the center or a "hub" for the expansion and outreach efforts in the north-central region of the state. From this hub, spokes ventured out in various directions. Churches that can be traced directly to Lancaster's missionary efforts would include: Winnsboro (1952); Great Falls ('50); Lockhart ('55); Union ('56); Chester

('58); Ridgeland (49); and Boonetown ('50). Other Churches that would be ancillary extensions on the Lancaster family tree would include Rock Hill (cir. 1945), York ('51), Clover ('53), Blacksburg ('54), and Lugoff ('58).

The Rock Hill Church comprised a large branch on Lancaster's family tree although it was of indirect descendent. In the early 1940s a small independent Holiness/Pentecostal group was meeting in a home located on N. Jones Ave. with Manuel Totherow serving as pastor. A short while later, Gaford Baker[46] seeking employment in the cotton mill moved to Rock Hill. Upon hearing of Totherow's group he sought to join himself to the small company of believers.

Baker inquired about organizing the home group into a church. Totherow responded that, even though he had once held licensed with the Lee branch of the Church of God he had become disenfranchised and no longer held credentials. Baker said that since he (*Baker*) was licensed in the Tomlinson branch of the Church of God, he could organize a church and assist Totherow in obtaining license in Tomlinson's group. This was done at sometime in the mid-1940s. Over subsequent years Gaford Baker would pastor multiple Churches in various locations. After being ordained by McDonald, Totherow was appointed as pastor of the Rock Hill Church. He proceeded to plant new churches in the neighboring towns of York and Clover. Rock Hill grew into one of the more prominent COGOP Churches in North America, consistently leading the nation in Mission giving.[47]

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[46] Gaford Baker was the oldest son of Walter E. and Vergia Starnes Baker and had been part of the original 'brush arbor' congregation. He was later licensed as a minister in the Church of God and served many years as pastor in several local churches.

[47] The Rock Hill (Harvest Ministries) Church has been recognized as the #1 Mission giving church in the COGOP North America, based on total annual contributions, continuously from 2006 – 2014.

John E. Evans, one the most remarkable characters to ever preach in South Carolina, was also closely connected with the Lancaster church. He was a "Free Holiness"[48] minister from Hemingway in the Pee Dee region who was renown as a powerful preacher, Evangelist, man of prevailing prayer, and Prophet whose predictive accuracy was uncanny. When McDonald heard of this tall lanky preacher he, "cut a trail to find" him.[49] Perry Barrett rehearsed the events of their first meeting, "When he (*McDonald*) walked up to the house he cried out, 'Well, praise the Lord. Hallelujah! Anyone home?'"[50] When Evans walked out on his porch to see who was speaking, he saw McDonald standing with his hands stretched out to greet him. As soon as their hands met they each, "shouted and went round and round, the Holy Ghost witnessing."[51] Evans testified that, "I felt an immediate bond right there, that God had great things in store for us."[52]

Upon hearing McDonald explain the doctrines of the Church of God, Evans readily agreed to unite with the church and thus, he transitioned his remarkable Spirit driven ministry to the church. He went to work immediately preaching and planting churches. In the words of Fred Fisher, "he became quite an Evangelist and new churches were started in his ministry . . . little 'ol struggling churches that no one would go to, he would go. He evangelized at great sacrifice."[53]

It was commonly reported that Evans would walk hundreds of miles annually, seeking opportunities to share the Church of God message. In much the same fashion

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[48] "Free Holiness" was a historic description of Pentecostal ministers or churches that were not aligned or under the governance of any mother organization.
[49] Shepard and Shepard, *My Adventures with God*, 141.
[50] Shepard and Shepard, *My Adventures with God*, 141.
[51] Shepard and Shepard, *My Adventures with God*, 141.
[52] Related by Fred Fisher, Interviewed by author, Lancaster, SC, August 23, 2012.
[53] Fred Fisher, Interviewed by author, Lancaster, SC, August 23, 2012.

as B.H. Petty had done in Lancaster in 1938, Evans would walk through any door open to him and preach to whomever would listen. He was known to walk the highways until his feet bled. He would then sit by the roadside, soak his feet in a creek or stream, wash his blood stained socks and dry them on a tree branch while he rested. Then, it was back to the highways and bi-ways.

Sometimes during the 1940s, Evans moved to Lancaster because he had a sister who was living there. He would use Lancaster as his center of operations for the remainder of his life. This worked out well since Lancaster was by now an evangelistic epicenter that willingly supported mission workers. Evans extended the influence and reach of the Lancaster church far beyond it's previous bounds.

In 1948, Evans had use of an old car that he took to Ridgeland where he started a church planting revival. Ridgeland, located in the low country between Charleston and Savannah, would have been a full days travel by automobile from Lancaster in 1948. There he erected a war surplus bivouac tent and began preaching his sermons of salvation, holiness, divine healing, and the Great Church of God. He continued his revival for six weeks while sleeping in the back seat of his car. He would go to a nearby gas station where he would refresh himself, bathe, and wash his clothes.

Betty Bunton Fisher was a young girl who witnessed the Ridgeland Revival. She said he, "only had a bivouac tent - *he* got it from some Army store. J.E. Evans set up a tent in my grandmother's yard. You know the bivouac tents were just little things. And it had holes in it and when it rained you had to sit in certain places to not get too wet. But, he preached for six weeks and nobody but just a few people would come and sit under the tent. But lots of people would park right there on Highway17 and sit

in their cars and listen to him preach. He would preach for over an hour every night. Then my two aunts and me and a cousin - we went and got saved. Of course, we were [*previously*] saved Baptist style – We went to the altar seeking, we didn't know what it was – it was all new to us. No holiness church had been Ridgeland. The four of us began to seek the Holy Ghost."[54]

Evans preached for six weeks and then he brought Sister Dora Lee Stewartfrom Lancaster to nurture the infant work.[55] Fisher said, Stewart "was kind and . . . she would just speak so sweetly that she touched so many people, especially my aunt. She stayed with us for several weeks [to stabilize and establish the work] and Brother Evans organized the church with six maybe seven people and it went from there."[56] Thus, with the efforts of Evans and Stewart another limb was added to the family tree and lineage of the Lancaster Church that began in the old-fashioned brush arbor cathedral.

The major themes preached by McDonald, Evans, and all of the Lancaster-based ministers included the Gospel message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, holiness enabled by the second definite work of grace, Sanctification, the Pentecostal experience known as the baptism in the Holy Ghost, miracles, and divine healings.

But, make no mistake, the overriding emphasis for revival and expansion was the often-repeated message of "The Great Church of God." While countless others

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[54] Betty Fisher, Interview by author, Lancaster, SC, August 23, 2012. Betty Bunton was very active in the Ridgeland church until she met and married Fred S. Fisher. She and her husband developed quite a ministerial linage as they served the COGOP as pastor, District Overseer, State Overseer, North American Presbyter, and General Overseer.

[55] Stewart was the sister of former State Overseer John B. Sears (1934). She was a well spoken, dignified, and greatly respected female Evangelist who made her home in Lancaster. A talented singer it was not unusual for her to sing in tongues.

[56] Betty Fisher, Interview by author, Lancaster, SC, August 23, 2012.

were preaching the message of God's saving and cleansing grace, as well as the experience of Pentecost, Tomlinson and McDonald's legions found their niche in the reverberating assertion that the Church of God was, in fact, the continuation of the New Testament church that Jesus had organized.[57]

For the first time, people like Vergia Baker, who had lived a life of social insignificance, were now convinced that they were part of the greatest movement of God on this earth. Fred Fisher,who served as pastor of the Lancaster church in the early 1950s related that, "their testimonies would go something like: 'I'm saved, sanctified, filled with *Heaven's* sweet Holy Ghost, and a member of the Great Church of God.'[58] And, "the Great Church of God" *message* resonated in their spirit and they felt like they were in God's army and were going to take this world for Jesus."[59]

They may have worked long strenuous hours performing menial tasks in textile mills or farms – they may have been looked down on and talk down to by supervisors or landowners – and, they may have had no influence in City Hall, the Court House, or at the bank – but, when they sang about "Victory in Jesus" or declared, "I've Got a Home in Gloryland" and they felt the Spirit of God moving – when they proclaimed unashamedly that "I am a Child of the King" – for two or three hours they were no longer no class/low class, uneducated, bottom rung, minimum wage income earners, no nothing renters – they were members of The Glorious Church of God with an

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[57] In his book, The Last Great Conflict, written in 1913 by A.J. Tomlinson, he devoted the entirety of chapter fourteen proclaiming that the Church of God is the "Bible Church." While he lessoned his dogmatic position in later years, his early assertions permeated church traditions. See: A. J. Tomlinson, *The Last Great Conflict* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1984), 97-102.

[58] Fisher would later serve as SC State Overseer for 8 years. He later served as General Presbyter over North America as well as General Overseer of the COGOP from 2000-2006.

[59] Fred Fisher, Interview by author, Lancaster, SC, August 23, 2012.

inheritance among the angels in heaven. And, they felt that with the help of God Almighty, by the power of Heaven's Sweet Holy Ghost, and in the name of Jesus they could and would take the world for Christ!

A.J. Tomlinson believed, practiced, and taught the doctrine of divine healing. For many years he insisted that his ministers also trust the Lord for their healing and discouraged the use of medicines or doctors. McDonald, as most of his contemporaries, was greatly influenced by Tomlinson. Therefore, all ministers and most members of the church in South Carolina would rather die than "fail God by going to a doctor." Consequently, miracles were commonplace during the expansion years.

This was never truer than at the Lancaster church. Vergia Baker was instantly healed of a compound leg fracture while Maggie Pressley[60] was likewise healed of an open cancerous sore that fell from her ankle leaving no outward signs that it had ever been there. These were only a couple of examples reflecting the faith that led them to expect answered prayers.

Theirs was a simple faith. If the "Word" said it, they believed it. Almost universally uneducated they had to rely on others to tell them what the Bible said and what it meant. M.S. Curry said, "If someone prayed for your baby and its fever broke, then you had confidence in that person and if they told you the Bible said something, you believed it." In some respects, they did not know enough to foster unbelief in God's healing power. Although the times were hard, they were considerable less complicated. If God said it, they believed it without question. Their perceived

[60] This author personally witnesses this miracle that happened during a prayer service conducted in Maggie Pressley's home circa 1957.

weakness may have been their lifesaving strength as they were people of childlike faith and uncluttered theology.

Once, while worshiping in the storefront church building, someone brought a 12-year-old boy who had been blind from birth to the church for prayer. The members gathered around the young boy and began to pray for his healing. However, after praying for a significant amount of time the boy was yet blind. So, believing God could do anything, they prayed a second time. When the boy was still unable to see, Vergia said, "We knew that God could heal the boy, so the problem had to be with us."[61] Thus, they separated into various parts of the auditorium where each person entered into deep soul-searching. Vergia recalled, "we asked the Lord to search our lives and reveal anything that was wrong in us." After a lengthy time of personal reflection Vergia said, "I couldn't think of anything that I did wrong. I did chew gum so I promise the Lord if he would heal that boy I would never chew chewing gum again." When the church reassembled to lay hands on the lad, they prayed once more and the "Power of God" fell with resounding manifestations as God miraculously opened the blinded eyes. This healing was witnessed by many people who eagerly testified of God's miracle working power.

Similarly, in 1949 J.E. Evans was seriously injured in an automobile accident, breaking his pelvis on both sides. "The hospital staff insisted on giving him treatment, but he told the nurses to wash the sand off his face and called his children to come to

[61] This story was recounted to this author by Vergia Baker before her death. Years later this author met the previously blind man who confirmed the account of his healing.

take him home. The doctors told him that he would not be able to walk again without treatment, but he went home."[62]

A couple of weeks later, he persuaded someone to put a cot in the back of a pickup truck and take him to Darlington where the church was meeting for a District Convention. During the service that night, the ministry was divided into two parallel columns, commonly known as a prayer line. All who were sick or afflicted were encouraged to walk between the two lines of ministers who would lay hands on them and pray for their healing. Evans, with the assistance of friends and crutches was brought to the prayer line. William Shepard, an eyewitness to what happened next reported that, "As he went through the line . . . the healing power of God covered his body. The crutches went one way and he went the other. He shouted, jumped, and ran all over the building and never so much as limped. He was instantly healed before a church full of people as a witness to God's healing power . . . Then he went to the pulpit and preached his message."[63] The miracle left an indelible impression on Jessie Hunter, a young lad who attended the Convention with his parents. He recalls that, "the next day Brother Evans was still walking without a limp and again preached for over two hours."[64]

The church planting fever was rampant among the ministers and particularly so with McDonald. Soon after his arrival in 1935 McDonald planted a new Church in Charleston. He remained in the coastal city for a few years, but as the churches

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[62] Shepard and Shepard, *My Adventures with God*, 71.
[63] Shepard and Shepard, *My Adventures with God*, 71.
[64] Jessie Dean Hunter, Interviewed by author, Lancaster, SC, June 4, 2012. As a child, this author knew J.E. Evans who was, at that time, in his 70s. Although his health was failing and he was resigned to the use of crutches, when he would testify and feel the 'anointing', no support was needed as Evans would run and dance like a young man until his testimony was ended at which time he would return to his crutches.

multiplied, he thought it beneficial to be more centrally located. Therefore, the same year B.H. Petty was organizing the new work in Lancaster that would become the heart of the central Piedmont region, Bishop McDonald moved to Darlington where he functioned as both local pastor and State Overseer.[65]

Shortly after relocating to the Pee Dee region he gained a foothold in a "nest" of Pentecostal ministers in the Lake City area. This acquaintance blossomed into an alliance resulting in the "setting in order" of several new churches.[66] The Camp Branch (Lake City) COG was organized that year (1938) and would serve as that district's anchor church. Other churches quickly sprang from the rural Camp Branch congregation including: Terrells, near Scranton (1938); High Hill; Piney Grove; Pleasant Grove (all organized in 1941-42); and Hicks Chapel (1943). Unlike the seed that was planted in stony ground, that quickly sprang up, but lacking a root system soon withered away (Matt. 13:5-6), every one of those original plantings has functioned unceasingly, continuously bringing forth fruit since their inception.

These country churches were clustered together within a few miles of each other. While the rich black soil, prevalent in the area, was perfectly suited for agricultural purposes, the Lord was nourishing and the ripening the missionary zeal already sprouting in other sections of the state. From the original core group, local volunteers moved into the surrounding communities where they successfully implanted the Church of God flag.

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[65] It was during his Darlington years McDonald met the great Evangelist and church planter, J.E. Evans.

[66] Lake City was a stronghold of the Pentecostal Holiness Church of which many of the ministers that followed McDonald had been licensed.

Allard Parker erected a tent for revival services in the town of Olanta amidst the summer heat of 1953. In September he closed the crusade in order to attend the Annual Assembly in Cleveland, TN.[67] Soon thereafter, Sister Nettie Lee[68] from the Hicks Chapel church and Evangelist Dora Lee Stewart from Lancaster rekindled the revival fire that continued until later that fall when Oscar Broach, the Hicks Chapel Pastor, officially organized the new church.

Perry Barrett rehearsed how the powerfully energetic McDonald attracted, nourished, and encouraged many young ministers to accept their calling.[69] If they were willing, Brother Mac, as he was called, would put them to work. It was a form of "on the job" training that was similar to the manner many country boys were taught to swim in which they were thrown into the water and told to 'sink or swim.' Few actually drowned since there was always a helping hand available to rescue the floundering.

Such was the case of the youthful Nettie Lee, who immediately after her conversion in April 1953 started preaching. She eagerly joined the experienced Evangelist, Dora Lee Stewart, in revival work. Under the tutelage of Stewart and others, the twenty-four year old Lee was a catalyst in the establishing of the Olanta church, as well as, another church planting in Kingstree some years later.[70]

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[67] The 48th Annual Assembly was held September 8-14, 1953, Cleveland, TN.
[68] Nettie Lee, Phone Interview by author, March 21, 2014.
[69] Shepard and Shepard, *My Adventures with God*, 141.
[70] Since women ministers had not been given the authority to conduct official church business, Lee 'preached out' the church at Kingstree, but District Overseer Willard Payne officiated the organization process in the mid-'70s.

Lee remained faithful in Evangelism, Church Planting, and Pastoral work for over 60 years until her retirement on January 26th 2014.[71] Her name is added to the honor roll of saintly women warriors who answered the call to "spend and be spent" without whom, the survival and success of the Church of God in SC would have been significantly thwarted.

In 1941 a problem arose in the Greenville church requiring Bishop McDonald to relocate there and assume the pastoral responsibilities. This would mark a seminal moment in church history as McDonald brought the same evangelistic zeal to the upstate that had previously infected the Pee Dee region. He quickly established Greenville as his operational headquarters. Land was purchased and a state tabernacle was constructed on Lindall Avenue where state conventions were held annually. The West Greenville church thrived in the same location, becoming the single most progressive and powerful church in the state.

The annual conventions were a sight to behold. The West Greenville Church served as host and set the stage with an accomplished orchestra. Some of the most talented and anointed musicians in the southland came from the Greenville area and their brilliance was utilized to cover every corporate event with a baptism of sound. The Kelly Brothers from Pelzer were renown as remarkable musicians and songwriters. Newt Kelly wrote many top rated Gospel songs while his brother Joe played lead guitar for County Music legend Hank Williams Sr. before accepting a call to the ministry. Additionally, the Huffman brothers formed the foundation of the West Greenville band, by far the largest in the state. Accomplished instrumentalists with a

[71] Nettie Lee's ministry in South Carolina spanned 60+ years covering the tenure of 13 State Overseers.

gift for arranging, Bill and Joe Huffman started Mark IV and Mark V studios and produced recordings for some of the top names in Gospel and Country music. Their studio musicians served for years as the "house band" for both the Country Music and Dove (Gospel) Award programs.[72]

From small towns and communities across the state, pilgrims gathered in Greenville each summer for the Convention. Hearing the inspirational messages illuminated by a jubilant cacophony of music, they felt they were indeed part of the greatest movement of God this side of heaven. The oft-repeated call to evangelize the state and plant churches reverberated fervently in their hearts. By the time the convention ended each possessed enough "Church of God zeal" to power their vision until the convention convened next year.[73]

While Evans and Lee were representative of those who worked in the central and eastern part of the state, other young champions were being identified in the shadows of the Blue Ridge Mountains. In 1949 a young man, Vernell Cobb, joined the Church in the Greenville. Known by his initials E.V., Cobb would soon surface as the spark plug of the upstate.

Like most reasonable men, he did not run impetuous to accept his call into the ministry. His daughter, Avanelle Pelfrey, remembered that, "he knew God had called him into the ministry but he didn't feel he could do it . . . Before he accepted that calling, he began to lose weight . . . he got down to around 130 lbs. The doctors admitted him to the

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[72] According to Joe Huffman's website (http://www.nashvilleear.com/joe.pdf) he has earned 25 Dove Award Nominations, 5 Dove Awards, 8 Grammy Nominations.

[73] The State Convention, and General Assembly held in Cleveland, TN marked the spiritual convocations all Church of God members embraced annually. To those associated with the Church in McDonald's day, these two gathers were as important as the ancient Jew's Jerusalem pilgrimages.

hospital but couldn't find anything wrong with him."[74]

While in the hospital Cobb realized that if something did not soon change, "he was going to die. He got up and walked out of the room because he didn't want to die . . . with the other patient. At that point he bargained with God, 'God, you know I'm not a speaker . . . but if you will let me live, I will supply the man if you will supply the words.' At this point, he immediately began to get better."[75]

He was awarded minister's credentials in 1951 and like his contemporaries, jumped into the work of the Lord with both feet planting a new church in Pickens that same year. This probably was during his first pastoral appointment at the Mt. Pisgah Church. However, Cobb soon developed a burden for the people in the nearby town of Pendleton, in historic Cherokee Indian Territory that had been settled by General Andrew Pickens shortly after the Revolutionary War.

Driven by his passion for Pendleton, he borrowed $2500 from a local bank and paid himself a salary of fifty dollars a week for one year so he could devote his full energy to his church-planting dream. It would prove difficult to raise a family of four on his self-administered salary of $50 per week (equivalent to approximately $436 in 2014).[76] But, like all other Holiness/Pentecostal ministers of his generation he learned early to trust the Lord.

His daughter was a young child at the time, but recalls an occasion when they were expecting an over-night visit from a traveling minister, "Mom and Dad went to the store to buy food for breakfast. That was all the money they had and Mother was

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[74] Avanelle Pelfrey, e-mail message to author, March 31, 2014.
[75] Avanelle Pelfrey, e-mail message to author, March 31, 2014.
[76] "Inflation Calculator." Dollar Times. April 1, 2014. Accessed April 1, 2014. http://www.dollartimes.com/inflation/inflation.php?amount=50&year=1953.

so worried because she did not have anything to fix for lunch. The three of them were going visiting that morning and Dad assured mother that she shouldn't worry because God had never let them down."[77] Her recollection continues, "Back then we never locked our doors . . . When they returned from their visitation, the kitchen table was full of groceries with a note that read, "God told me the preacher needed food!""

His efforts bore fruit quickly. Not only was Pendleton set in order as a new church, it became the heart of Cobb's continuing church-planting campaigns as he subsequently established new churches in Easley, Camp Oak (Tamassee), Liberty, Anderson-Liberty Drive, West Anderson, Belton, Corinth, Fair Play, Fountain Inn, and Iva.[78] A few years later, while serving as Regional Overseer, he officiated the organization of new churches in Denmark[79] and Springfield. In total, he organized 14 churches in SC.

Fisher remembers Cobb as one who, "ran day and night . . . making the schedule of appointments (that were) almost impossible for one human to keep up."[80] In perpetual motion, Cobb and his wife, Frances, visited hundreds of homes every month, as well as making calls to all the hospitals in the region. He served on every state board and committee in the Church, acted as both a District and Regional Overseer, and directed the Christian summer camping ministry for 11 years. Additionally, in the General Assembly of 1973, Cobb was recognized for receiving the most new members into the church

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[77] Avanelle Pelfrey, e-mail message to author, March 31, 2014.
[78] Source: The SC Church of God of Prophecy State Archives. This data was presented by State Overseer, Bishop Harper Hunter during E.V. Cobb's funeral in June of 1983.
[79] The Church at Denmark was a product of the labor of M.K. and Margaret Dobson who bought the property and worked the community. Cobb likely officiated the new church organizing ceremony as part of his duties as Regional Overseer.
[80] Fred Fisher, Interview by author, Lancaster, SC, August 23, 2012.

(covenant members), more than any other minister, nationally and/or internationally in the Church of God of Prophecy.

Using every available tool to spread the Gospel, he conducted a weekly radio program for over 30 years, and when WGGS-TV[81] began broadcasting in the Greenville market in 1972 Cobb, ever the visionary trailblazer, did not hesitated to purchase airtime. He hosted a primetime weekly TV program that covered much of the NW upstate region, airing each Saturday at 7:00 pm, during the last ten years of his life before passing the torch to his wife, Frances.[82]

Perhaps no one exemplified the McDonald era foot soldier better than Cobb who labored night and day to carry the Gospel and Church of God message across SC. Fisher said that he worked so hard that, "he actually killed himself" in the process.[83]

An eventful day in early June 1983 started out like most others for E.V. and Frances Cobb. They visited three hospitals before traveling to Belton (Jones Chapel) to help with Ellen Bell's funeral where they sang two songs, "I Want To Stroll Over Heaven With You,"[84] and "I'll Meet You in the Morning."[85] Shortly thereafter, Cobb told his wife he was not feeling well. On the front steps of the Jones Chapel Church, E.V. Cobb suffered the heart attack that ushered him into the presence of God.

During his funeral his final ministerial report was read. In the month of May 1983 Cobb preached 31 sermons resulting in four Conversions, four Sanctified, with

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[81] WGGS-TV, the oldest independent station in SC, began broadcasting in 1972 splitting airtime between family friendly secular entertainment and religious programing.
[82] After E.V. Cobb's death, his wife, France, continued his ministry legacy of pastoring as well as broadcasting religious program on WGGS-TV for a total 37 years, until her death in 2010.
[83] Fred Fisher, Interview by author, Lancaster, SC, August 23, 2012.
[84] J.B. Lemley, *I Want to Stroll Over Heaven with You* (Franklin, TN: Brentwood-Benson Music Publishing, 1970).
[85] Albert E. Brumley, *I'll Meet You in the Morning* (Hartford, CT: Hartford Music Company, 1936).

two receiving the baptism in the Holy Ghost. In addition to his preaching, TV program and radio ministry, he visited 929 homes that month. With his death at age 59, a remarkable era ended, but his legacy remains as 12 of the churches he organized continue to function as of this writing.

After 25 years of revolutionary ministry, McDonald was transferred to Alabama at the General Assembly of 1960. He was a man for the times, the right man for SC. While men such as E.V. Cobb's work extended beyond Brother Mac's tenure, he would remained their spiritual father that birthed them in the ministry.[86] Incredibly, E.A. McDonald, Sr. licensed about 261 Evangelist and 10 Bishops while he was in SC. The total number of churches grew annually; increasing on averaging by more than three new churches in each of the twenty-five years he led his Palmetto troops. The six weak sisters of the poor McDonald inherited in 1935 increased to 85 by the time of his departure.[87]

Perhaps no minister commanded more respect and dedication in SC than Bro. Mac. He was the benevolent General and the foot soldiers followed him unquestionably. Bishop E.V. Cobb expressed the blind obedience of the ministry when writing to the Overseer regarding his church appointment for the next year he said, "I believe in the Theocratic Government of the Church. The Church is my life and I want to be where I can be of the greatest service to God and His Church."[88] At a time when the State Overseer had ultimate control, appointing or assigning each minister to their place of ministry, Cobb, perhaps the most influential preacher in the state, requested only, "When you feel you have prayed and have the will of God for my work next year, I will accept it as the

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[86] Shepard and Shepard, *My Adventures with God*, 217.
[87] Shepard and Shepard, *My Adventures with God*, 211.
[88] Source: The SC Church of God of Prophecy State Archives.

will of God."[89]

No greater testimony of a man's life and character can be found than the witness of his family. McDonald's oldest son quoted his mother, Eula Mae, as saying, "I have lived with your daddy for more than fifty years. I have made some mistakes in my life, but in all those years, I have never heard your father say or do anything wrong. If I had to put my finger on one sin in his life, I couldn't touch it."[90]

When considering the Christian example E.A. McDonald, Sr. modeled, the manner in which he raised the Carolina ministry from infancy to maturity, and how he breathed life into and resuscitated the dying remnant of Tomlinson's loyalist, words are inadequate to define his impact. In 1967 the singer Lulu struggled to find expression to her boundless gratitude toward her beloved teacher when she asked, "How do you thank someone who has taken you from crayons to perfume?"[91] McDonald will forever be revered for taking the church in SC from "crayons to perfume," from diapers to dignity, from crippled to running, from cowardly to courageous, from surviving to thriving, and from the edge of extinction to remarkable vitality.

Even though McDonald left SC in 1960, he remained active in full-time ministry until he retired ten years later. Thereafter, he was a constant fixture in the Greenville community of churches until his death on Oct. 13, 1997 at age 91. His family, witnessing his dying hours, said that while he was apparently comatose during his final days, his lips started moving a few hours before his death. When his youngest son, Gerald, finally leaned close enough to hear, he was amazed that his father was preaching his final sermon,

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[89] Source: The SC Church of God of Prophecy State Archives. Additionally, McDonald was known to seek the Lord in fasting many days (up to three weeks at a time) each year before making Pastoral appointments. Ministers trusted his ability to 'hear from the Lord.'
[90] Shepard and Shepard, *My Adventures with God*, 144.
[91] Don Black and Mark London, *To Sir with Love* (EMI Music Publishing, 1967).

which continued until his dying hour.[92]

[92] Dying account shared with the author by Gerald McDonald in 1998.

CHAPTER 6. THE GENERATION OF CONTINUOUS EXPANSION

Leadership is not about titles, positions or flowcharts.
It is about one life influencing another.
–John C. Maxwell

During the tenure of Bishop E.A. McDonald, Sr. the church in South Carolina experienced not only a period of remarkable growth, but also encountered significant challenges confronting the international body. For the organization that was still struggling to fully recover from the effects of a crippling split 20 years earlier, the death of A.J. Tomlinson[1] (Oct. 2, 1943) was, in a real sense as traumatic as the death of Moses had been to the nation of Israel 4400 years earlier.

After 40 years of his larger than life presence it was difficult to imagine a future without him in leadership. However, the Tomlinson name would remain at the head of the church for another 47 years.

A.J.'s oldest son and confidant, Homer, was widely considered to be the eventual successor to his father's office. While serving as State Overseer of New York, Homer had been his father's staunchest supporter during the difficult days surrounding the 1923 disruption. Reported to have an extremely high I.Q., Homer was a prolific writer, and visionary who grabbed headlines with his inordinate flair for showmanship. However, when the state and national Overseers convened immediately after A.J.'s funeral (Oct. 7, 1943) to select a successor, the proceedings did not follow Homer's desired script. As the

[1] Tomlinson suffered a stroke in September 1937 only four days after the close of the General Assembly. After 1½ years of near total incapacitation, his health was fully restored by July of 1938. He soon resumed his taxing schedule of 16-hour workdays. However, on September 16, 1943, only a few days after moderating the 38th Annual Assembly, Tomlinson collapsed. He never recovered and died Oct. 2, 1943 at the age of 78.

assembled presbyters (Overseers) discussed procedural questions and possible candidates, "at 11:13 a.m. . . . after a demonstration of the spirit, a message in tongues was interpreted which said, "Bring forth the younger son.""[2] Subsequently, other Presbyters confirmed this sentiment proclaiming the Lord had informed them of His choice before they arrived in the meeting. "At 12:16 pm, the state and national Overseers present voted unanimously to select the younger son of the former General Overseer [Milton] to fill the vacancy."[3] "The 1944 general assembly the following year ratified the choice."[4]

While Homer initially endorsed his brother's selection, his support soon evaporated, giving rise to rebellious disapproval. However, his efforts to wrest the office from his brother never garnered much support as the general church warmly embraced their newly selected leader. Surrounding himself with many of his father's trusted advisors, Milton carefully navigated the onslaught of issues and responsibilities adeptly enough to remain in the highest office of the Church for 47 years.

Besides the ill-fated challenge from his brother, Milton would face several other landmark challenges during his first decade in office. Animosity and legal struggles with the other branch of the Church of God based in Cleveland never subsided as contentions between the two groups escalated. The most significant issue culminated in a court battle over exclusive rights to use the name Church of God. Both groups had claimed and used the name since the '23 split distinguished only by the affixing of the leader's name.[5]

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[2] Philip D. Smith, "Exodus: A Holy Nation at Risk" (DMin diss., Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, 2009), 67.
[3] Smith, "Exodus: A Holy Nation at Risk," 66.
[4] Smith, "Exodus: A Holy Nation at Risk," 66.
[5] A.J. Tomlinson strongly disagreed with having to use his name as a denominational identifier. In his diary entry of January 1st, 1930, he stated, "The court finally wrote a decree claiming he could not grant our petition removing the Tomlinson as a prefix, but went on to state that we could go on for the time being using Church of God over which A. J. Tomlinson is overseer." Tomlinson,

The controversy continued unresolved for 29 years. However, F.J. Lee's heirs become more aggressive in their efforts to own sole distinction. Heated disputes, bitter contentions, and subsequent court proceedings culminated on May 1, 1952 when Chancellor Glenn W. Woodlee forced Tomlinson's group to adopt the name Church of God of Prophecy as the legal identifier.[6] The Cleveland Daily Banner reported, "Chancellor Woodlee's decree . . . was a result of a complaint by the Church of God, a rival organization with headquarters on Montgomery Ave., N.E., in Cleveland . . . It was not his purpose to govern how the (Church) should refer to themselves during their worship services and other meetings."[7] According to James Stone, "The Church agreed to the name change with the understanding that it in no way referred to how the worship, internal structure, or government of the Church was conducted. It was for external use only as a means to identify the Church from other organizations with similar names."[8]

Such happenings as the death of A.J. Tomlinson, the transition to new leadership, the contentions of Homer Tomlinson, as well as legal turmoil with the Church of God that necessitated a significant name change were disquieting, to say the least. However, in South Carolina, these events created mere ripples and not tidal waves. Through years of strong leadership Bishop McDonald had established himself as a respected and trusted leader and as long as he was occupying his patriarchal office his sons and daughters in the faith were assured that the 'old ship of Zion' was in good hands.

A.J. *Diary of A. J. Tomlinson 1925–1943*. Edited by Hector Ortiz. Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2013.

[6] Cause no. 1891, Chancery Court for Bradley County at Cleveland, Tennessee. See: C. T. Davidson, *Upon This Rock*, 3:624 (Cleveland TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1976).

[7] James Stone, *The Church of God of Prophecy History & Polity* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1977), 67.

[8] Stone, *The Church*, 67.

No one would match McDonald's time in office or his total influence. His 25 years of service overshadowed all successors, both in length of tenure and in achievements. He raised up and licensed almost all of the ministers who were active by the time of his transferring to assume the Overseer's office in Alabama. Of 161 ministers active in 1959-60, McDonald had credentialed all but six. During his tenure (1935-60) he licensed a total of 261 Evangelist and ordained 20 Bishops.[9] Additionally, under his leadership an average of three new churches were planted annually in the state.

An oft-quoted axiom states that no one wants to follow a legend. It is preferable to be the one who follows the person who follows a legend. Thus, the task given to L.V. Jones, Sr. in 1960 was daunting to say the least.

Jones was no novice. He had many years of experience, serving as State Overseer in Tennessee (1945-58) and Alabama (1958-60).[10] Where McDonald was a short, physically unimposing man, Jones was taller, with a stern disposition. Quite a few ministers who were steadfastly loyal to McDonald found it difficult to bond with Jones. Consequently, during the first couple of years of his tenure, Jones recommended the revocation of at least a dozen ministers including some of the more prominent and respected men in the state. One could interpret the friction as a power struggle, but it was just as likely an inability of McDonald's loyalist to adapt to a new father figure.

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[9] Minsters could be licensed as: Deacon, Evangelist, or Bishop. Bishops and Deacons were ordained by the laying on of hands by the State Overseer and General Overseer. Conversely, Evangelists were merely recognized as licensed ministers. While deacons served primarily in the local church, they were ultimately accountable to the State Overseer.

[10] State Overseers were appointed during the Annual Assembly with their tenure beginning during the fall of the calendar year. Thus, one term would end the last day of September while another would begin October 1st.

One of the rising stars licensed by McDonald in the late 1930s was a charismatic, natural born leader, J. Vernon Galloway.[11] As a child he had accidently fallen into an open fire, severely burning and permanently scarring his face. However, while still a young man he determined to overcome his physical malady by accentuating his positive attributes such as his strong personality, his excellent people skills, a brilliant business mind, and remarkable work ethic. As a result, he excelled in pastoral work, as well as in personal business pursuits. When he married the beautiful Mary Lou Plemmons, it was testimony to how well he had successfully overcome his physical limitations. She often noted that his character and personality were so remarkable that she didn't notice his scars.

Like many of his contemporaries, Galloway developed significant proficiency as a builder. In the early 40s he helped transition the Lancaster congregation to a new location on Elm Street, constructing a new church in the heart of the textile district. The new facility was strategically located in the village where the majority of the congregation lived. The church continued the growth pattern that existed since its origination on a sharecropper's farm five years earlier.

Galloway would leave Lancaster for other pastorates,[12] but returned in the late 50s at McDonald's request. When Jones became overseer in 1960, Galloway never hesitated to declare his support.[13] However, the strong personalities of Jones and Galloway would

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[11] William Shepard and Eufaula Shepard, *My Adventures with God, Bishop E.A. McDonald, Sr.* (Greenville, SC: Southern Historical Press, Inc., 1997), 157.

[12] J. V. Galloway joined the COGOP in 1939; began preaching in 1940; was licensed as an evangelist in 1946; and ordained a bishop in 1972. He served as pastor in Conestee, Greenwood, Ware Shoals, Lancaster–Elm St. (twice), Pelham, Inman, Greer, Lancaster – Memorial Park, Rock Hill, and Sumter–Blvd. Rd. He organized 7 new churches: Ware Shoals, Inman, Greer, Landrum, Mountain View, Batesburg, and Lancaster – Memorial Park. Information courtesy of SC Church of God of Prophecy State Archives, accessed October 31, 2014.

[13] In an article published in the Dec. 24, 1960 edition of the White Wing Messenger (6) while giving tribute to McDonald's 25 years of leadership, Galloway acknowledged the newly appointed

soon clash. When Jones sought to remove him from the Lancaster church, Galloway and his local supporters rebelled against his directive, culminating in a painful church split. The well-beloved pastor separated from the COGOP and organized his own group that he named "The Church of God Fellowship."

The power struggle between Jones and Galloway did little to wound either of the two strong leaders. Jones would continue as Overseer of South Carolina a few more years before being reassigned to a similar position in other states. Galloway had learned early in life to survive and thrive beyond his scars. Shortly after his departure, he increased the size of his organization by planting additional churches in Lancaster and Chester counties.

Ever the influential leader he recruited several young ministers from the region who enthusiastically followed his vigorous leadership. While Jones and Galloway continued their respective careers undeterred, their conflict effectively crippled the landmark church at Lancaster that had long been the strength of the region.[14]

Jones, a 'company man', was unwaveringly loyal to M. A. Tomlinson and to the church. Like many of his contemporaries he believed the COGOP was the exclusive Church of God of the New Testament. A recurring theme of his letters and sermons revolved around being fateful to the Bible, and unquestionably loyal to the Church. Often, when informing Tomlinson of a need to revoke a minister's license, he would classify the person in question as "disloyal," "disobedient", or as not being "Church" men.

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overseer saying, " . . . we are proud to get a man like Brother Jones. He and his family have taken up their work and have already won a place in our hearts."

[14] Not long before Galloway pulled out of the COGOP and organized his own denomination, he committed the Lancaster congregation to purchase new property just south of town. When Galloway left, he took the large majority of the existing membership and thus the preponderance of financial support, leaving the remaining congregants with crippling debt. While the Lancaster COGOP survived, it can be argued that the once thriving church never recovered from this setback.

Conversely, those disloyal and disobedient ministers viewed Jones as exceedingly dogmatic, possessing a "my way or the highway" mentality. Much can be understood of Jones' temperament by noting the extreme opinions expressed by those who worked with him. While men like J.R. Henderson of Alabama would say that Jones was the best overseer he ever worked with,[15] others described him as unyielding, difficult to work with, and impossible to get close to.

Jerry Smith, presently serving as the Senior Pastor of the fast growing The River Church of God, Nashville, TN, was the youngest son of pastor H.E. Smith when Jones arrived in South Carolina in 1960. He recalls a gentler side of the man who went fishing with him, and took time to have long talks with the teenage boy. His fond remembrance of Jones remains clear some fifty years later. He said, "I've never met a man in my life that was driven more by purpose and passion than L.V. Jones. [He] loved the concept of the Church of God of Prophecy [as being] the exclusive Bride of Christ. He was committed to that as much as he was committed to the message of the cross."[16]

Irrespective of the diverse opinions of Jones' personal and administrative style, there can be no denying the success South Carolina continued to experience throughout his tenure. During his brief four-year stint the number of churches increased by twenty-two, a remarkable 26% growth rate.

Jones' successor, George Albert Wilson, had likewise amassed quite a resume of service and leadership in the church before arriving in the Palmetto State. Continuing the

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[15] Quoted in an interview with Henderson's son, A.L. Henderson, 10/08/2014.

[16] Jerry Smith, Interview by author, Phone Interview, Nashville, TN, October 30, 2014. "The church never officially identified itself as the exclusive body of Christ, but informally many in the church celebrated the idea. Today the church officially presents itself as constituting a part of the universal church" (Philip D. Smith, "Exodus: A Holy Nation at Risk" (DMin diss., Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, 2009), 14).

success of his predecessors, the church prospered during the reign of Wilson as the total number of churches grew by 11[17] and covenant membership rolls increased 28%.[18]

Jerry Smith began his ministry under Wilson who not only signed his minister's license, but also took him under his protective wings. Traveling with Wilson, Smith not only functioned as an Auxiliary Secretary,[19] but also as his personal chauffeur.[20] He recalls Wilson as "the preachingest man I was ever privileged to be associated with [*as well as*] a tremendous motivator."[21]

While traversing the state he encouraged new church plants and the continued support of the small works that dotted the Carolina landscape. One of his oft repeated sermon themes was Zechariah 4:10, "For who hath despised the day of small things?" While the ever-increasing number of small and weak congregations troubled many, Wilson used his motivational skills to encourage the people to "rejoice insomuch as God was enabling them to be part of something small."[22]

Wilson's successor, Maurice S. Curry often repeated the same scriptural reference (Zechariah 4:10) and analogized that he himself once weighed only 7 lbs. but had grown considerably since then. He often reminded his constituents that everything large begins

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[17] Since at least 6 churches were disbanded during Wilson's term, 17 new church plants would have had to occur in order to experience the increase in numbers.

[18] According to membership data recorded in the 59th Assembly Minutes (September 8-14, 1964, Cleveland, Tennessee, 28) the last year of L.V. Jones tenure, SC statewide membership totaled 2345. Conversely, the 63rd Assembly Minutes (September 10-16, 1968, Cleveland, Tennessee, 30) the last year of Wilson's administration this number had grown to 3008.

[19] A.J. Tomlinson had initiated the "Big Business Program" of the Church in the late 20s, the centerpiece was the operation of various Auxiliary ministries such as the Women's Auxiliary (or Mission Group). Other Auxiliary groups were focused at Youth, Pastoral Care, and Sunday School Ministry. For many years the State Overseer would maintain a full staff of secretaries, each responsible for overseeing, boosting, and reporting the results of each statewide ministry.

[20] During the decades of the 50s – 70s it was common practice for an Overseer to appoint a promising young minister to his Secretarial Staff and use him as his unofficial chauffeur. Consequently, the many hours of travel time were used to mentor the young protégé.

[21] Jerry Smith, Interview by author, Phone Interview, Nashville, TN, October 30, 2014.

[22] Jerry Smith, Interview by author, Phone Interview, Nashville, TN, October 30, 2014.

life very small. Curry was both one of the most successful overseers in the history of the COGOP, and arguably the most fascinating character to ever occupy the office.

He was a pioneer of the Pentecostal faith having interned under the ministry of his father, J.F (Battle Ax Bill) Curry. The elder Curry was as colorful as his name. Noted for the unusual 'stunts' used to attract crowds to his tent meetings and street services, Curry was given the name 'Battle Ax Bill' in Mobil, AL in 1917 or 1918. Biographer, Roy Mixon recounted that, "After being arrested several times, (for preaching on the streets) he got a big wagon and horse and went to the park in Mobile and preached from the wagon."[23] When the local sheriff confronted him, recalling that he had been ordered to cease preaching on the streets, Curry responded, "I wasn't preaching on the street I was preaching on a wagon."[24] When W.B. Jessup "saw this determination to be obedient to God rather than to men" he tagged the elder Curry with the handle, "Battle Ax Bill."[25] He readily embraced the name and used it thereafter for publicity purposes.

In the early days of the burgeoning Pentecostal movement, Battle Ax Bill was known to do almost anything to attract a crowd. During the depression era hard times he would attach various denominations of money to a long rope, then pull it down the small town Main Streets. By the time he reached the edge of the city an ever-growing group of people would be following him like the Pied Piper. He would proceed to pull in the rope and began preaching the gospel to the assembled gathering.

He was also known to stand at the base of a utility pole, looking up. When curious old lookers would gather, Curry would stand on a box and again declared the gospel.

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[23] Roy D. Mixon, *My Father's House* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House and Press, 1981), 13.
[24] This story was recounted publically many times by M.S. Curry.
[25] Mixon, *My Father's House*, 13.

Such shenanigans seem childish and antiquated in our day, but in the less sophisticated era of the Great Depression, Curry's approach was remarkably successful.

M.S. (Maurice) worked with his father in revival work, riding on the back of wagons or flatbed trucks throughout Florida, Georgia, and Alabama. "Maurice's job was to play music and direct the band, consisting of guitars, banjo's, mandolins, auto harps, ukuleles, portable piano and organ."[26]

Often the Curry traveling revival team consisted of as many as 25 people. Mixon states that Bill Curry "was probably the greatest evangelist and soul winner of the last days Church in the 20th Century."[27] As a result of his revivals, often conducted in tents, rented buildings, as street services, or open-air meetings, the Pentecostal Movement was birthed throughout the region of North Florida, South Georgia and Alabama. Numerous churches were organized, and literally thousands of souls were saved.

M.S. Curry inherited much of the natural showmanship of his father.[28] He also inherited a great passion for souls, the Pentecostal religion, and promoting the Church of God. When his father was appointed as State Overseer of Florida in 1929, Maurice

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[26] Mixon, *My Father's House*, 11.

[27] Mixon, *My Father's House*, 16.

[28] While serving as State Overseer in Florida, Curry would send a 'sound wagon,' (a Dodge Rambler limousine station wagon with large speakers attached to the roof and advertising signs on the sides) to park out in front of the football stadium in Gainesville Florida each time there was a home game. He would also send the station wagon to every County Courthouse in the state and park it out front. When the judges and lawyers came out they would see the name of the Church prominently displayed. This gave the Church name recognition and some credibility, even in the highest offices of the land.
During Curry's final appointment in the state of Alabama, he succeeded in having Gov. George Wallace appear as a special guest. As Wallace set in his wheelchair, the Overseer told him about the Church of love and presented a hand-painted portrait of the former governor to him. Curry introduced him to a standing ovation as "a man who loves and cares for his people." Tears began to stream down Wallace's face as Curry's daughter, Barbara Gilmer, sang "Someone To Care." Roy Mixon would later say that "this was a great moment for two great men – a climax befitting two dedicated men – one to his political convictions, the other to the high standards of the Church of God of Prophecy" (Mixon, *My Father's House*, 65).

followed him, assuming pastoral duties for the Ocoee church. During his pastorate the local membership more than quadrupled. Although he would leave Ocoee for Shannon, Georgia in 1937, he retained property in the central Florida town for the next 40 years.

While serving in Shannon, Curry was invited to preach a revival at the tabernacle church in Cleveland Tennessee, where General Overseer A. J. Tomlinson was a member. As was his style, Curry hit Cleveland with explosive energy and enthusiasm, bringing a small string orchestra and several extremely Pentecostal revival workers who would stir the service and the congregation with their spiritual demonstrations. The Cleveland revival was a tremendous success; so much so, Curry was invited to become the pastor of the Tabernacle Church.

In addition to Tomlinson, the headquarters' church was a veritable who's who of present and future church leaders. The International Church's General Treasurer, A.J. Lawson, was the senior Deacon, while Tomlinson's son, Milton, was the junior Deacon. Milton would eventually succeed his father as General Overseer and filled the office for 47 years.

After serving as Tomlinson's pastor in Cleveland, Curry was appointed as State Overseer of Florida in 1939. Thus, he began his career as an overseer that would span thirty-nine years: 20 years in Florida, five in Georgia, four in North Carolina, five in South Carolina, and five in Alabama. He personally organized 50 churches, and under his leadership 168 total churches were planted as more than 5,000 new members were added to the COGOP.[29]

By the time Curry arrived in South Carolina in 1969 he was a seasoned and brilliant administrator. As was his modus operandi, Curry always traveled with a small

[29] Mixon, *My Father's House*, 79.

group of musicians as part of his staff. Ever the evangelistic showman, he started every sermon with a tenor (four-string) banjo on his knee while singing one of the folksy songs he had written. His songs were always simple, down-to-earth, often funny, but always carrying deep meaning. When he sang about a '*Turkey Buzzard*' sitting on the comb of the church, sunning himself in the air, he would explain that the turkey buzzard was a strange old bird that never lighted on anything living. Therefore, when he landed on the church, it had to have been a dead church. In his song "Crooked Street" he celebrated the day of his conversion when he "moved from Crooked Street to Glory Avenue."

His sermons were punctuated by humorous, yet meaningful stories. As a matter of fact, Curry was a master orator who could spin multiple yarns that would hold the attention of all age groups. One of his guiding principles was that you could say very "hard" statements from the pulpit as long you said them with a smile and used humor.

Few could match the combination of music, folksy humor, and sincere passion for the gospel and the Church that came naturally for Curry. Possessing an entrepreneurial spirit he excelled in business, both personally and for the Church. He often bought land on speculation, purchasing many parcels along major highways in hopes of a future church plant. Likewise, he amassed a large quantity of personal property, including a small orange grove, as well as 29 rental houses in FL. When Curry was appointed to a state the bills were paid, properties were purchased, upgraded, and maintained, and the financial disposition improved dramatically.

Perhaps his greatest attribute was his talent for promoting the COGOP. Almost like a carnival front man, he was busy endorsing every auxiliary, department, and program the Church offered. As dependable as sunrise, he visiting five churches every Sunday and

required his staff to do likewise. He felt that the Overseer and his staff should be present in every church in the state each year.

While he had little formal education, someone called him a "cornfield psychologist," acknowledging his remarkable ability to motivate and activate into service those who had previously been unusable. Where others had given up on certain people, his attitude was expressed, "We can help this man."

One such disenfranchised minister was J. V. Galloway, who had left the COGOP during L.V. Jones' administration, forming his own organization called the Church of God Fellowship. Curry reached out to him, bringing his son Julian onto his personal staff, and eventually integrating all of Galloway's churches back into the fold. Galloway would remain a respected and fateful minister in the church until his death many years later.

When Curry was relocated from South Carolina to Alabama in 1973, his departure would effectively end the era of rapid expansionism that began in 1935 under the inspired leadership of E.A. McDonald. McDonnell had led the church for 25 years, inheriting a group of six anemic storefront churches, which grew numerically to 84 during his tenure - a 1300% increase.

L.V. Jones (1961-65) who facilitated the addition of 22 churches – a 26% numerical increase, followed McDonald. Next, under G.A. Wilson's guidance (1965-69) 13 more churches were added – another 10% increase. Moreover, membership numbers soared to 3008 members – a 28% increase.

Lastly, during the five years of M.S. Curry's stay in South Carolina, there was an escalation of 23 churches, an 18% increase. Correspondingly, covenant membership rolls grew a remarkable 47%. (See Table 2)

Table 2: Church/Membership Data (1960-1973)

Overseer	Churches	Membership
E.A. McDonald 1960	84	2150
L.V. Jones 1961	86	2286
L.V. Jones 1962	92	2143
L.V. Jones 1963	96	2198
L.V. Jones 1964	106	2345
G.A. Wilson 1965	105	2379
G.A. Wilson 1966	109	2612
G.A. Wilson 1967	109	2773
G.A. Wilson 1968	117	3008
M.S. Curry 1969	122	3131
M.S. Curry 1970	127	3458
M.S. Curry 1971	126	3775
M.S. Curry 1972	132	4060
M.S. Curry 1973	138	4417

Combined, the diverse quartet of McDonald, Jones, Wilson, and Curry would lead the COGOP in South Carolina through an era of unprecedented growth: from six churches in 1935 to 138 in 1973[30]. Likewise, the number of covenant members grew from approximately 100 to 4,417.[31] However, one would be mistaken to think that these great leaders accomplished such remarkable exploits single-handed. As Napoleon said, "Soldiers generally win battles; generals get credit for them."[32]

[30] The COGOP in SC grew a remarkable 2200% during the 38 years from 1935 to 1973.
[31] The number of members increased 2800% during this period of rapid expansion.
[32] Mark Nicholas, *I Come First: How the Individual Ego Rules Every Business Decision* (Redondo Beach, CA: Barely Lit Publications, 2010), 164.

"It is, I believe, the greatest generation any society has ever produced."[33]

Tom Brokaw's now famous quote about America's Greatest Generation labeled the men and women who survived the Great Depression, won WWII, and built the economic infrastructure that made America the superpower of the 20th Century. Similarly, it was the same generation of tough, dedicated, and courageous men and women that transitioned the Church of God of Prophecy from struggling infancy through the era of unparalleled growth into denominational maturity. Without that generation of pastors, evangelist, and lay leaders, the Church would never have survived its spiritual Great Depression following the church split of 1923 and the family feud style warfare that regrettably marked the subsequent years.

Below is only a partial list of ministers who were active during the years of rapid expansionism. These reports are taken from available records in the state archives of the South Carolina COGOP located in Rock Hill, South Carolina.[34]

A.O. Freeman began his ministry 1953. He organized churches in Walterboro, Knightsville, Ladson, and Brewington. Freeman served as pastor in Grays, Holly Hill, Charleston–North Station, Hoodtown, Orangeburg, Walterboro, Knightsville, and Ladson. In 1969, Freeman was honored during the Annual Assembly as a leading pastor in the church. That year he took in the most new covenant members (42), while reporting the most converted (100), sanctified (91), filled with the Holy Ghost (57) and baptized in water (38).

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[33] Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation* (New York: Random House, 1998), 11.

[34] Archival data is woefully inadequate for the years prior to 1960. Consequently, this is by no means an exhaustive list. Many noteworthy ministers are not included because record are inadequate or no longer exist. However, this listing is offered simply to reflect the sacrificial service of the remarkable men and women built the Church of God of Prophecy in South Carolina.

Allard Flowers was renowned for both his physical and spiritual strength.[35] As a pioneer he started the Florence church by converting a bar room into a sanctuary. In Sumter, while serving as pastor and District Overseer, Flowers organized the first black church in the region in the home of Sister Elizabeth Gary. His grandson, Andy Altman, told of the genesis of the COGOP in North Charleston, where "they had tent services, then [worshipped] in a shell box building, then built the first building with walls and roof and started having services with no windows or doors."[36] Legend says that once while preaching in a home meeting some local ruffians came to disturb the gathering. Flowers, a large man, never stopped preaching, but taking the rabble-rousers by the nap of the neck and the seat of the pants proceeded to throw them out of the open doors and windows one after the other until peace returned to the meeting. While his bodily strength was natural, his grandson gives evidence to the source of his spiritual strength: "He would go out behind the parsonage and pray at an old stump every morning around daylight."[37] Altman continues, "He would have to get a new Bible every year because he would study so much that the pages would be falling out within a year."[38]

Arthur Greene began his ministry in 1956. He served as pastor of African-American congregations in Sumter, Lancaster, Tarboro, and Camden. He organized one church during his ministry.

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[35] Flowers was first mentioned as a minister in the State Convention Minutes of 1939. Otherwise, few records remain of his extraordinary ministry. See: William Shepard and Eufaula Shepard, *My Adventures with God, Bishop E.A. McDonald, Sr.* (Greenville, SC: Southern Historical Press, 1997), 149.

[36] Andy Altman, e-mail message to author, September 25, 2012.

[37] Andy Altman, e-mail message to author, September 25, 2012.

[38] Andy Altman, e-mail message to author, September 25, 2012.

C.Y. Satterfield organized churches in Fountain Inn, Woodruff, and Wattsville. He served as pastor in Anderson, Ware Shoals, Hartsville, Clinton, Wattsville, Greenwood, Batesburg, and Union. Satterfield was active in ministry for over 33 years.

Claude Ayers served as pastor in Chester, York, Pelzer, Dacusville, and Jones Chapel. He entered the ministry in 1961 as a preaching deacon, was ordained a bishop in 1977, and filled pastoral assignments for 35 years. A native Catawba Indian, Ayers chaired the state Ways and Means Committee for many years.

Coline Zellars join the Church of God of Prophecy in 1963 and immediately began teaching and preaching. She pastored the Shady Grove Church in Ware Shoals for 26 years – from 1975 until 2001. During her ministry she preached 2,265 sermons. She pastored the first predominantly black congregation in South Carolina to accept whites as members.

Dora Lee Stewart began preaching at age 15 and was licensed in 1944. Involved primarily in evangelistic work, Stewart specialized in church planting ventures. She was active in ministry continuously for 48 years, filling in occasionally as a supply pastor.

Douglas Roddy pastored for 37 years, from 1954 - 1991, shepherding congregations at Highland, Inman, Union, Una, Florence, North Charleston, Camp Branch, Clinton, and Hicks Chapel. He was also active in the youth camp ministries, serving for many years as the chief cook.

E.L. (Bud) Ammons ministered continuously from 1951-1985 during which time he reported preached 3,774 sermons leading to 649 conversions, 500 testified of a

sanctification, and 357 received the Holy Ghost. He administered the church membership covenant to 169 people. His wife, Dorothy, was a licensed minister also. Together they evangelized and pastored for 34 years.

E.V. Cobb organized churches in Anderson (Liberty Drive), Anderson (West), Belton, Camp Oak, Corinth, Easley, Fair Play, Fountain Inn, Liberty, Pendleton, Pickens, and Springfield. He served many years as District Overseer, Regional Overseer, Youth Camp Coordinator, State Trustee, and as a member of numerous committees. In 1973 he was recognized in the General Assembly as the pastor taking in the most new covenant members in the United States. Cobb and his wife, Frances, excelled in media usage, hosting a weekly TV program in the Greenville area for more than 30 years. After his death, his wife continued pastoral work an additional 20 years.

Earnest C. Richmond, Sr. worked in both North and South Carolina. He organized one church in North Carolina, and one in the community of Ninety Six, South Carolina. With distinction he served African-American congregations in Ware Shoals (Shoals Junction), Walhalla, Ninety Six (Little Mountain Road), and Richland. He also served on the State Overseer's staff as Field Representative from 1979 through 84. He was a member of the State Finance and Appropriations Committee for several years.

Elizabeth Gary was licensed as a Female Evangelist in 1957. In the early 1950s the first 'colored'[39] church in the mid-state (Sumter) was organized in her home. Active in

[39] The term "colored" was the acceptable distinction of the era and all black congregations were thus listed in all official publications. The exact date for the organizational ceremony is unknown, listed in E.A. McDonald's notes simply as organized before July of 1953.
See: Shepard and Shepard, *My Adventures with God*, 192.

ministry for 30 years she served black congregations in Great Falls, Winnsboro, and Sumter (Barwick). She was appointed as a State Evangelist during the Curry administration.

Florence Ayers - was licensed as a minister in 1954 serving as pastor at Cherokee Falls, Pacolet, and Poole's Bend. She provided pastoral care to extremely small congregations for 37 years, filling a need that few others would.

Floyd Smith, Sr. joined the COGOP in 1935 in his home state of Georgia. He was licensed as an Evangelist in 1936, and ordained as a Bishop in 1952. After moving to South Carolina in 1944 he served as pastor in Pelzer, Walhalla, Darlington, Westminster, Lancaster, Dacusville, North Charleston, Holly Hill and Pelham. He organized one church in Georgia and one in Seneca, South Carolina. Smith was recognized in 1974 for taking in 37 covenanted members; the second largest additions in the church worldwide.

Freddie Edwards was converted and called into the ministry in 1951. He began his ministry in house-to-house prayer meetings, even converting two rooms in his home for such gatherings. He served as pastor in Grays, Hampton, Ridgeland, and Nixville as well as interim pastoral stints at Ruffin, Lobeco, and Moselle. He organized churches in Hampton, Branchville, Grays Hill (Beauford), and Brunson. Edwards served as District Overseer in the low state area for many years, leading the district to purchase property and build a local campsite where various regional activities were held. It was the only regional church campground in the state.

Furman West joined the church in 1943, began his ministry in 1944, and was ordained as a Bishop in 1968. He served as pastor in Conestee, Riverside, Pickens, Pickens

Chapel, Pelham (twice), Easley, West Anderson, Highland, Summerville, Pendleton, and Anderson – Belmont. West assisted with several new church plants, erected one parsonage, constructed one church (Easley), and remodeled several others. He served many years as District Overseer and on the State Finance and Appropriations Committee.

H. E. Smith - Pastored for over 43 years in Georgia (15 years) and South Carolina (28 years). In South Carolina he ministered in Ware Shoals, Charleston, Sumter, Rock Hill, Greenwood, and filled the office of District Overseer for many years. Smith organized one new church in Georgia and one (Monks Corner) in South Carolina. He was honored many times in Conventions for outstanding achievements in local church growth.

Hazel Dyer was licensed as a Female Evangelist in 1942. She ministered powerfully for many years in Georgia, Alabama, and South Carolina, also serving on the State Overseer's staff as director of the Women's Missionary society (Auxiliary). Although she was divorced, she served the Lord in her singleness for many years. With no formal training, she would play the piano under the anointing of the Holy Spirit with dramatic effect as a highlight of her revival services.

Henry Lamb joined the church in 1944 and began his ministry in 1948. He was licensed as an evangelist in 1949 and ordained as a Bishop in 1961. His pastorates included tenures at Hoodtown, Hartsville, Piedmont, Charleston, West Greenville, Anderson (Belmont), Easley (Twice), Greenville (Fleming), Calhoun Falls, and Simpsonville. All totaled he was active in ministry for over 38 years.

J. A. Magaha - joined the church in 1947, began his ministry in '48 and was ordained as a Bishop in 1961. He pastored in places such as Honea Path, Clifton, Mount Pisgah, Pickens, Jones Chapel, Pelzer, Lancaster, Ware Shoals, High Hill, Timmonsville, York, Cherokee Falls, Camden, Sumter, and Central. His pastoral service spanned 35 years.

J. V. Galloway joined the church in 1939 and began preaching in 1940. He was licensed as an Evangelist in 1946, and ordained as a Bishop in 1972. He served as pastor in Conestee, Greenwood, Ware Shoals, Lancaster–Elm St., Pelham, Inman, Greer, Lancaster – Memorial Park, Rock Hill, and Sumter – Blvd. Rd. He organized churches in Ware Shoals, Inman, Greer, Landrum, Mountain View, Batesburg, and Lancaster – Memorial Park.

Galloway served as District Overseer for many years, and as publisher of the *State Newsletter*. His ministry spanned 47 years: 29 years as a district overseer; 43 years as a pastor; and two years on this State Overseer's office staff. In total he organized eight churches, erected nine church buildings, and five parsonages. During his ministry he set forth approximately 30 ministers.

James Watson was active in ministry in South Carolina for over 45 years, beginning as State Youth Director, then as a pastor. In 1955, as Youth Director, he started the Christian Camping ministry in South Carolina. Thirty-eight participants attended that first week of camp held at the Ware Shoals church. The girls slept inside the church and the boys outside in tents. The Christian Camping ministry has continue

to be a vital tool of fellowship, discipleship, and evangelism, positively impacted the lives of thousands of young people approaching 60 years. [40]

James Willis joined the church in 1960 and immediately accepted his call into the ministry. He was ordained a Bishop 1967. Willis served as pastor in Central, Six Mile, Rice's Creek, and Walterboro where he also served as District Overseer. He organized the church at Six Mile. His sons, Michael and Dewayne, followed him in ministry, each pastoring successfully for three decades.

Lloyd Harvey was converted in 1943 and started one of the most remarkable ministry sagas ever recorded in South Carolina. The Gospel message was like fire in his bones as he delighted in preaching and reaching the lost. Licensed in 1958 by his father-in-law E.A. McDonald, Sr., Harvey soon organized the Greenville-Fleming Street church. Although he served occasionally in pastoral assignments, he was better suited for revival work where his record is unsurpassed. As a revivalist in South Carolina [41] Harvey's record list 2,415 Conversions, 1,048 were Sanctified,[42] and 1,582 received the Holy Ghost Baptism during his crusades. He traditionally called Thursday nights 'Miracle night', as he encouraged the local congregations

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[40] Camp Agape', located on 46 acres near Batesburg, SC annually hosts five age specific Summer Camp ministries. The Christian Camping department has expanded to include weekend retreats such as: Men's Retreat, Ladies Retreat, Couple Retreat, Youth (Winter) Retreat, Minister's Training, Lay Ministers (Basic Training) Retreat, and Seniors Retreat. Additionally, a pristine 170 acres tract of land is being developed in the NW corner of the state, in the shadow of the Blue Ridge Mountains, for future camping and conference needs.

[41] These statistics do not include the years Harvey served as State Evangelist in Tennessee and Alabama.

[42] The COGOP historically has accepted the Wesleyan tradition regarding Sanctification as the Second Definite work of Grace: instantaneous and entire work of Grace that cleanses from the original, fallen nature of Adam enabling holy living in the individual and preparing them for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

to fast and pray all day for miraculous manifestations in the evening service. Many testified of healings, demonic deliverance, and other spiritual wonders. One night, during revival services at the Fleming St. Church, while giving the altar invitation, Harvey spoke in tongues for a lengthy period of time. Immediately, a first time visitor came running to the altar to accept Christ. Afterward, through an interpreter, the man asked Harvey where he had learned the Russian language, attesting that he had given the invitation in fluent Russian. Harvey confessed that he had never learned or spoken the language, but celebrated the gift of the Spirit known as 'speaking in other tongues,' a manifestation of xenoglossia.[43] Such displays of diverse spiritual gifts were common in Harvey's ministry.

Luther Cooke joined the church in 1950, was licensed as an Evangelist in 1951, and ordained as a Bishop in 1966. His pastoral record covered 59 years, as he led congregations at Piney Grove, High Hill, Sand Hill, Pleasant Grove, Camp Branch, Timmonsville, Clinton, Calhoun Falls, West Greenville, Darlington, Anderson–Belmont, Greenville – College Park, Greer, Fountain Inn, Mount Pisgah, and Anderson–Westside. He served as District overseer for many years, and on most state committees.

M.K. Dobson, Sr. served as pastor in Denmark, Easley, Smoaks, and Springfield. Like many who ministered in the small southern communities, Dobson paid for the privilege of pastoring through agribusiness and the milling of timber on his family

[43] See Acts 2:4-11.

farmland.[44] He organized the church in Denmark, and was active in pastoral ministry 17 years.

Manuel Totherow wrote the following testimony: "I organized the work in Rock Hill, South Carolina in 1942 and pastored [there] until 1946. I was assistant pastor in Greenwood in 1946 - 48. During that time Brazil Kelly and I took a tent and did evangelistic work in Ruffin. We organize a church there in 1947. In 1948 I was asked by the State Overseer to go back to Rock Hill and help build a building. I took a tent and held services until the building could be built. In 1950 I went to York to hold prayer services with the desire to organize the church. God works in strange ways and after the town of York arrested me for disorderly conduct during the revival and particularly during altar call, God gave us a victory and I organized a Church in York in 1952. I stayed in York until 1953 when I went to Florence (Piney Grove) and rebuilt the work there. In 1955 Brother McDonald asked me to go to Clover and help with the work there. I stayed there and had a building partially built. I left in 1956. I pastored Lugoff Church 1973 – 74 and Newberry Church 1974 – 76. Then, I returned to Clover.[45]

Nettie Lee joined the Church in 1946 and immediately accepted her call into the ministry. As a young lady she ran revivals, and worked in new field efforts. She was instrumental in the planting of new churches in Olanta and Kingstree, both in the Pee Dee region near her home. Sister Lee labored in ministry for over 60 years, including 44 as pastor before retiring in January of 2014 at the age of 84.

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[44] Men and women who accepted the appointment to small churches did so knowing that not only would they not receive much salary, they would more than likely have to pay many of the church bills out of their own pockets.

[45] Information courtesy of SC Church of God of Prophecy State Archives accessed October 31, 2014.

Roosevelt Ashford, a North Carolinian by birth, came to pastor the black church in Rock Hill, South Carolina in 1964 following the death of the former pastor, Robert Moore, his father-in-law. A tireless worker and experienced church planter, Ashford planted churches (black congregations) in Winnsboro, Great Falls, Ware Shoals-Shady Grove, Lancaster, and Richland. He served on the State Overseer's staff for 20 years and in the early 1990s was the first black minister appointed to the office of District Overseer in South Carolina. He ministered in South Carolina for 29 years before returning to NC in 1993.

Roy Suggs joined the church in 1959, began his ministry in 1960, and was ordained as a Bishop in 1963. He pastored churches in Maryland and Michigan, before settling in South Carolina. In South Carolina he served in Charleston (Orange Grove), Pelzer, Ware Shoals, and Williamston. In total he pastored 43 years, 31 of them in South Carolina where he organized the church in Ravenel.

He acted as District Overseer as well as serving on most state committees. He was very helpful in assisting State Overseers with all business, and construction matters. He was an accomplished contractor, building numerous churches, as well as camping facilities in both Maryland and South Carolina.

T.C. Parker was converted in September 1943, and joined the church in October of that year. He began his ministry in 1944 and was licensed in 1946. He served as pastor in Summerville, Lancaster – Elm Street, Pelham, Hartsville, Charleston–Lee Street, West Greenville, Ware Shoals, Anderson–Belmont, Greer, and Pendleton. His remarkable pastoral ministry spanned 38 years during which time he took in an amazing 499 members by covenant. Parker, a dedicated church planter was

willing to work with anyone, anywhere. Besides personally organizing seven new churches he 'helped' plant 12 others. His brother, Allard, was also active in pastoral ministry for many years.

Tom Hart - joined the church in 1946 and began his ministry in 1947. He was licensed as an Evangelist in 1948 and ordained as a Bishop in 1956. He served as pastor for 35 years in Macedonia, Westminster, Walhalla, Rock Hill (twice), Dacusville, Pelzer, Pelham, Greenville (Riverside), Greer, Greenwood, Rice's Creek, Mount Pisgah, Starr, and served as District Overseer for many years. Hart organized the church at Cherokee Falls.

Willard Payne began his ministry in 1957 and was ordained as a Bishop in 1971. Payne pastored Camp Oak, Owen's Chapel, Seneca, Greenville-Fleming St., Summerville, Pelham, Ware Shoals, Florence, Piedmont, and Pendleton. His pastoral and District Overseer experience spanned 50 years.

William Ford joined the church in 1948, began his ministry in 1957 and was ordained a Bishop in 1959. His 26 years of pastoral ministry included stops in Camp Oak, Jones Chapel, Honea Path, Pickens Chapel, Liberty and Conestee.

William Josleyn entered the ministry in 1953. He served as a pastor in Indiana, Illinois, Oklahoma, before moving to South Carolina in 1976. During his ministry he organized two churches, supervised and helped build four churches and four parsonages. In South Carolina he served in Greenville–Carolina Heights, Pelzer, Charleston - Orange Grove, Calhoun Falls, St. Johns, and North Charleston while serving as District Overseer and on various State Committees. Josleyn was known

for his consistent prayer life, habitually praying for hours each day. It was said that when William Josleyn prayed, things happened!

CHAPTER 7. A GLORIOUSLY INGLORIOUS STORY

> I love the Church of God of Prophecy. It's a unique, diverse family of brothers and sisters. It's the most integrated church I've ever seen in my life. Halleluiah! And everybody gets together, just gets along so naturally, its wonderful. And, what a family feeling I get when I come here. In fact, I feel like I'm part of the family tonight.
> –Vinson Synan[1]

It would be absolutely wonderful, bordering on heavenly, if in the famous words of Rodney King we could "all just get along."[2] It is amazing that Godly, Spirit-filled men and women can interpret the same passages of Scripture in a myriad of ways. While the 'Holy Spirit' was given to lead the recipients into all truth, it seems that the 'truth' is filtered through the lenses of personal enlightenments, presuppositions, and prejudices. Such was the diversity that evolved from the early roots of Pentecostalism that led to separations, splinter groups, and the formation of new denominations.

Perhaps the most tragic separations were caused by the typical fleshliness interrelated to skin color. In spite of the holy and honorable desires of early Pentecostals, existing cultures, exacerbated by Jim Crow laws, made spiritual cohabitation among mixed ethnicities practically impossible among most classical Pentecostal groups. Frank Bartleman observed that a remarkable identifier of the revival years at Azusa Street was

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[1] Dr. Vinson Synan, historian, author, and educator is arguably the most respected commentator on the Holiness/Pentecostal tradition. He commented on the racial harmony in the Church of God of Prophecy when he addressed the 97th International Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy July 25-29, 2012, Louisville, KY.

[2] Rodney King's original quote: "People, I just want to say, you know, can we all get along? Can we get along? Can we stop making it, making it horrible for the older people and the kids? . . . Please, we can get along here. We all can get along. I mean, we're all stuck here for a while. Let's try to work it out. Let's try to beat it. Let's try to beat it."
Liz Weiss, "10 Famous Quotes That Are Misattributed," *Business Insider*, accessed July 27, 2011, http://www.businessinsider.com/10-famous-quotes-that-are-misattributed-2011-7?op=1.

that, "the 'color line' was washed away in the blood."[3] But, sadly, even the great 'color blind' leader, William Seymour eventually acquiesced to prevailing societal pressures when on May 19, 1914 the Apostolic Faith Mission approved a new Constitution requiring that the bishop, vice-bishop, and all trustees were to be "people of color."[4] According to Seymour, he reluctantly excluded whites from leadership in the church, "not for discrimination, but for peace."[5]

Consequently, the further twentieth century Pentecostals drifted from the genesis of the movement, racial divisions became the rule and not the exception. For example: the once harmonic relationship between the Church of God in Christ and the Assemblies of God fractured along racial lines effectively "ending the interracial experiment."[6]

Dr. Vinson Synan noted, "It was the southern system of segregation that destroyed the fellowship of the races and split the church along racial lines."[7] Indeed, this was the case in most Pentecostal denominations. However, one glaring exception to this pattern was The Church of God under the guidance of A.J. Tomlinson. Before and after the denomination's split of 1923, he was a trailblazer in his generation by promoting ethnic unity.

In 1971, historian David Harrell in his work *White Sects and Black Men in the Recent South* judged the COGOP to be the "largest racially mixed church in the South

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[3] Frank Bartleman, *Azusa Street* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2000, 1982), 54.
[4] Larry E. Martin, *The Complete Azusa Street Library*, vol. v. 1, *The Life and Ministry of William J. Seymour: and a History of the Azusa Street Revival* (Joplin, MO: Christian Life Books, 1999), 325.
[5] Martin, *The Complete Azusa Street Library*, 325.
[6] Vinson Synan, "The Missionaries of Azusa Street" HTCH 686B – The Birth of Pentecostalism, Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA, 6/26/14.
[7] Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1997), 174.

from 1945 until the mid-1960s."[8] He said that, "Unlike the larger Pentecostal sects, the CGP never separated its black members into a satellite organization. While local churches have generally been either black or white, the state assemblies, international assemblies, and church institution have been integrated throughout the history of the sect."[9] Harold Hunter[10] later observed that, "In some states, the CGP may have been the first church to defy Jim Crow laws[11] in their worship services. African-Caribbeans, African Americans, and Latin Americans have been charged with the leadership of states, some of which include European Americans as a majority. This unprecedented approach distinguishes the CGP, not only among Classical Pentecostals, but many denominations in the United States."[12]

Obviously, such 'outside the box' thinking can be directly linked to the leadership of the most recognizable figure in the Church. A.J. Tomlinson came by his racial ideology naturally, developed as part of his Midwestern, Quaker heritage. In 1836, Tomlinson's grandparents, Robert and Lydia were like thousands of other Southern Quakers who were part of the "Great Quaker Migration" as they left North Carolina to settle in Indiana. One of the strong driving factors for many of the Quaker's immigrating to the Midwest was their rigorous opposition to slavery. R.G. Robins reports that Robert and Lydia Tomlinson would becoming social activist in the Society of Friends who

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[8] David Edwin Harrell, *White Sects and Black Men in the Recent South* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1971), 95.
[9] Harrell, *White Sects and Black Men in the Recent South*, 95.
[10] Harold D. Hunter is Director of the IPHC Archives and Research Center.
[11] "The CGP may have been the first church to defy Jim Crow laws in their worship services, they have long opposed the Ku Klux Klan" (*The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, rev. and expanded ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub. House, 2002), 541).
[12] Harold D. Hunter and Cecil M. Robeck, eds., *The Azusa Street Revival and Its Legacy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009, 2006), 296. See also: *NIDPCM*, 541.

insisted they, "should continue to be above all 'friends of the colored man.'[13]

A.J.'s father, Milton, although not necessarily a religious Quaker, was nonetheless equal with his contemporaries in regard to social activism. This was clearly evident in the story Robins recounts of a runaway slave named John Rhodes who was captured near the Tomlinson's hometown of Westfield, Indiana. "When authorities tried to escort Rhodes out of town under the cover of darkness . . . the Quakers blocked their path."[14] In the melee that ensued someone helped Rhodes escape. "For the next several days he was shuttled between safe houses, finally landing at the Tomlinson farm."[15] However, his pursuers were not easily dissuaded and soon located him. As they approached the farm, "young Milton Tomlinson, twenty-four years of age . . . led Rhodes on a perilous flight through a forbidding swamp and to safety at last."[16] No doubt A.J. would hear the story of his father's bravery many times throughout his formative years. However, this was not just a story of familiar courage, it was in essence an imprinting into A.J.'s mind indelible images of doing the right thing in spite of overwhelming opposition.

A proclivity toward racial justice and equality would forever be a part of the Tomlinson family DNA. A casual perusing of Tomlinson's history and review of his sermons will show this seamless consistency. As early as February 1911 Tomlinson traveled to Nassau, Bahamas where he happily recorded in his diary, "Blacks and whites all come to meeting together."[17]

Edmund Barr was most likely the first black to be ordained as a Bishop in the

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[13] R G. Robins, *A.J. Tomlinson: Plainfolk Modernist*, Religion in America Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 67.
[14] Robins, *A.J. Tomlinson*, 71.
[15] Robins, *A.J. Tomlinson*, 71.
[16] Robins, *A.J. Tomlinson*, 71.
[17] Hunter, et al., 284.

Church of God on June 3, 1912.[18] In Tomlinson's diary entry of that date he said "Held a conference meeting yesterday to consider the question [*of*] ordaining Edmond Barr (colored) and setting the colored people off to work among themselves on account of the race prejudice in the South."[19] "The first official register of ministers in January 1913 included 11 black ministers (three with full ordination)[20] without any reference to race or color."[21]

While Tomlinson would have preferred to have fully integrated churches, he understood racial restrictions in the South where the overwhelming preponderance of the churches were located. Accepting the existing reality, in 1915 he appointed Barr to a two-year term as Overseer of the "colored"[22] work in Florida.[23] "Then Tomlinson appointed C.F. Bright Overseer of Pennsylvania in 1919, followed by New Jersey in 1920."[24] Hunter's research indicates that Bright was an African-American. This would have been a remarkable occurrence in as much as it was an appointment to two states without racial distinction or restriction.

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[18] *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, rev. and expanded ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 2002), 533.
[19] *The New International Dictionary*, 285. Hunter notes, "A.J. Tomlinson, diary, vol. 2, June 4, 1912, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. This entry is missing from the diaries as edited by Homer Tomlinson."
[20] The term "full ordination" means they were ordained Bishops.
[21] *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, rev. and expanded ed., 533.
[22] The designation of "colored people" was the accepted terminology during the era of A.J. Tomlinson and was not deemed offensive when appearing in publications or sermons.
[23] *Minutes of the Eleventh Annual Assembly of the Churches of God* (Cleveland, TN: Church of God Publishing House, 1915), 26. It is also noteworthy that Tomlinson gave Barr the opportunity to speak during the 1915 General Assembly. This, most likely was the first instance of a black person given official permission to speak in the churches Annual Assembly. See *Minutes of the Eleventh Annual Assembly of the Churches of God* (Cleveland, TN: Church of God Publishing House, 1915), 18.
[24] Hunter, et al., 285. See also *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, rev. and expanded ed., 533: "Most of the black constituency of that period was in Florida, although there were black congregations in Tennessee."

With such a commitment to racial equality it is not surprising that during the tumultuous days surrounding the church split of 1923 and subsequent impeachment of Tomlinson, the vast majority of black clergy stood resolutely by his side. Of this group, T.J. Richardson, W.V. Eneas (Bahamas), and William R. Franks (Bahamas) were on the Council of 70, the ruling elders constituting the upper echelon of church leadership. When he signed the petition filed against Tomlinson's chief antagonist, J.S. Llewelleyn, Richardson affirmed his group's support of Tomlinson saying, "As Overseer of the Colored Churches in the State of Florida and other states, I am free to say that all of the men are one voice with this petition. Amen."

Harold Hunter, writing about race mixing in the Church of God of Prophecy mentioned some of the difficulties experienced by Tomlinson supporters at the time of his impeachment.[25] While listing the black ministers who stood resolutely with Tomlinson, Hunter cited an account of C.T. Anderson of Wimauma, FL, who was a key architect of a petition filed against Flavius Lee's supporters on the Council of Elders. In a letter dated July 19, 1923 (five days before Tomlinson's impeachment) Anderson wrote, "No doubt you have notice that certain ones have tried to silence me from the ministry. I have never had the semblance of a trial, neither is there any foundation for their charges. Not satisfied with this, our State Overseer had me arrested and thrown in jail three days and then tried in the common courts, and I was freed without ever putting a witness on the stand."[26] One can only imagine the sobering effect Anderson's arrest had on other dissenters, especially the black leadership.

Possibly no one stood by AJ Tomlinson more resolutely than Bishop Stanley

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[25] Hunter, et al., 277-296.
[26] Hunter, et al., 289.

Ferguson, Overseer of the Bahamas. Homer Tomlinson, recalling the tumultuous days following the church split said that Ferguson, "stood with him, encouraging him to start again."[27] So great was their mutual love and respect for each other that when Ferguson died in 1934, "church flags were lowered to half-mast for three days as a sign of 'mourning and respect.'"[28]

Themes of racial unity and ethnic outreach where oft repeated in the General Overseers annual addresses. During the 9th Assembly (1919) Tomlinson focused on the Apostle Paul's "sacred utterance that God 'has made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth.'"[29] He added, "Our dark-skinned brothers and sisters have received the Holy Ghost as well as we and we have long ago learned that "God is no respecter of persons." In certain places and in some states of the United States, it is more expedient for them to have their own churches and schools separate, but when it comes to religion there is no difference, and we feel it is right for them to be recognized in the Assembly."[30]

Then, in 1922, Tomlinson shared his heartfelt convictions, "I do not like any separations between nationalities and races . . ."[31] However, in this 12th Assembly Address he acquiesced to cultural realities and acknowledged that it, "is not always convenient, neither is it best, for different races to meet together regularly for worship."[32]

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[27] Homer Tomlinson, *The Great Vision of the Church of God* (Queens Village, NY: Homer Tomlinson, 1939), 15.
[28] Robins, *A.J. Tomlinson, Plainfolk Modernist*, 227.
[29] A J. Tomlinson, *The Church of God Movement Heritage Series*, vol. 2, *General Assembly Annual Addresses, 1911-1927* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing, 2011), 106.
[30] Tomlinson, *The Church of God Movement Heritage Series*, 104-5.
[31] Tomlinson, *The Church of God Movement Heritage Series*, 181-2.
[32] Tomlinson, *The Church of God Movement Heritage Series*, 181-2.

Continuing to press his agenda in 1932, Tomlinson, drawing from both New and Old Testament typology said, "The middle wall of partition is broken down between the races and the nations when they get into the Church of God. Before it is completed it will be made up of all races and colors. This will make it Jeremiah's 'Speckled bird.'"[33] He boldly continued, "It will not be made up of white people only, or of colored only, or of any one race exclusive of all others. But it requires a union of the whites, the colored, the Browns, the Indians called the red man, the yellow races – and all under one government, one rule, one faith or doctrine – all one."[34]

Thus, Tomlinson set the tone for the Church of God.[35] As individual State Overseers embraced his passion they actively sought ways to reach the various ethnic groups in their regions.[36] In southern states this meant reaching out to blacks, as was the case in the Carolinas.

When E.A. McDonald inherited six struggling, storefront churches in 1935 his mandate from AJ Tomlinson was to relocate from Georgia and set up residence in South Carolina. The implicit mandate was for him to organize new churches. Additionally, he understood Tomlinson's vision and passion with regard to reaching ethnic groups.

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[33] A J. Tomlinson, *The Church of God Movement Heritage Series*, vol. 3, *General Assembly Annual Addresses, 1928-1943* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing, 2011), 142.
[34] Tomlinson, *The Church of God Movement Heritage Series*,142.
[35] The Church of God and Church of God of Prophecy maintained segregated seating area in the old Assembly tabernacle for many years. Upon being asked when this policy changed, church historian, Adrian Varlack said, "The Civil Rights Act of 1964 (enacted July 2) was a pivotal point for this nation and I am suggesting that from that time forward the Church Administration felt "freer" to integrate her official services and still be in accordance with the law. Obeying the laws (regardless of whether they were just or not) was important to this Church." – Adrian Varlack, e-mail message to author, January 8, 2015.
[36] In his diary, dated February 27, 1912, Tomlinson reports on the convention he attended in Raton that required the use of a Spanish-speaking interpreter. Minutes of the 1913 Assembly counted three Spanish-speaking congregations in New Mexico. See: Hunter, et al., 284.

Shortly after embarking on his inaugural tour of the state he settled in Charleston, in the home of family friend, Calvin Wilson. Soon thereafter, McDonald organized the church there. However, there is some question as to whether this was his first church plant in the state.

James Watson served on McDonald's personal staff in the late 1940s and early 1950s. He recalls with great clarity McDonald telling him that, "When he first came to South Carolina, his first order of business was to organize the little black church down close to Ridgeland."[37] While McDonald's biographer, William Shepherd, list the Charleston church as his first church plant, he confirms that during the same period a new church was set in order in the rural community of Tilman.[38] This congregation still functions as the Tarboro Church of God of Prophecy. Whether it was indeed McDonald's first church plant is inconsequential. What is noteworthy is that it was the first black work established in the Palmetto State. According to the minutes of the South Carolina State Convention of 1938, there was a 'colored' church reported at Tilman with Mrs. F. Williams serving as the pastor. This confirms that the church had been organized prior to July of 1938.[39]

According to census records Francena Hill was born in 1895 in the rural farmlands in Beauford County, the southern most region of the state.[40] Not much is known of her

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[37] James (Buddy) Watson, Interview by author, Seneca, SC, August 15, 2013.
[38] William Shepard and Eufaula Shepard, *My Adventures with God, Bishop E.A. McDonald, Sr.* (Greenville, SC: Southern Historical Press, 1997), 153.
[39] Shepard and Shepard, *My Adventures with God*, 150. The Convention of 1938 was the first to have written Minutes of the proceedings. Consequently, the exact date of the organization of the Tilman/Tarboro church is undeterminable other than between 1935-38.
[40] "Family Search.org: Francena Hill, 'United States Census, 1910'," accessed November 24, 2014, https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:M58R-SDQ. The unusual spelling of her name 'Francena' allows reasonable confidence in the accuracy of her birth records. According to the census of

formative years, but there is no reason to suspect that her plight was different than her contemporaries. After the two devastating financial downturns of 1920 and '28 many Southern blacks found themselves lost in the resultant economic shuffle. Cotton prices dropped drastically, farm laborers became expendable, and job opportunities all but disappeared. To survive, thousands of African-Americans migrated to the more industrialized cities in the north. Whether for this reason or some other, during the era of the Great Depression Francena migrated to Philadelphia. It was there she was introduced to the Church or God.

When she returned to South Carolina, sometime prior to 1935, Sister Williams had a burning desire to see the Church of God in her home of Tarboro. She found willing allies in State Overseer E.A. McDonald and District Overseer J.E. Evans. With their support, in a vacant field near Hwy. 321 in the rural community of Tarboro, Francena and her sister Mary mothered the first "Black" church in South Carolina.[41] Their earliest meetings were conducted under the grandeur of a canvas cathedral, otherwise known as a war surplus bivouac tent.[42]

Williams was known for her prophetic gifting. During the difficult days beneath the old tent, "She used to prophesy and Brother Evans the District Overseer would say,

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1910 she was born in Beauford County, SC in 1895. Later records show that she was widowed by 1940 when her son George was five years old.
See also: "Family Search.org: Francena Hill, 'United States Census, 1940'," accessed November 24, 2014, https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:K4DV-ZT5.

[41] Bishop James Jackson, Interview by author, Tarboro, SC, November 24, 2014 says that while the tent was located in Tarboro, the nearest Post Office was in Tilman. For this reason the first official records show the church as located in Tilman, SC.

[42] According to Betty Fisher, these older surplus tents were used frequently in church planting operations. These tents were in various stages of deterioration, dotted with numerous torn places. Betty Fisher, Interview by author, Lancaster, SC, August 23, 2012.

'Just go ahead and let her say what she sees.' She would prophesy that she could see a new church coming up in Tarboro."[43]

Following the same path as their Caucasian counterparts, the Tarboro congregation would soon move from their tent to a storefront building along the roadside.[44] Addie Hamilton who first met Sister Williams in the early 1960s recalled that the storefront had actually been a 'Juke Joint', an informal dance hall renowned for gambling and drinking, catering to the common, or poorer classes of people.[45]

The church continued to operate in that one room storefront building for many years until land was secured to build a more permanent structure. Bishop James Jackson, the current pastor at Tarboro, has lived in the area and attended the same church his entire 65 years. His historical recollection is that they built the original church, "A few blocks at a time . . . They would buy a few blocks . . . and use them and then raise some more money for a few [more] blocks."[46] Eventually, after the arduous process of building only whenever funds and supplies were available, a tin roof crowned the sanctuary. On the interior, hand made wooden pews and furniture adorned the auditorium. These furnishings were remarkably appropriate, reflecting the unpretentious elegance and extraordinary strength of the parishioners who graced them for many years.

Bishop Jackson says that once the congregation moved into the little block building "that the church started waking up."[47] The church was located down a dirt road, a considerable distance from the main highway. Hamilton said that parishioners and visitors

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[43] Bishop James Jackson, Interview by author, Tarboro, SC, November 24, 2014.
[44] The tent most likely belonged to the state church organization and would be moved to various locations as needed in church planting and revival efforts. The constant raising, lowering, and relocating of the old tents added to their budding 'holey' ambiance.
[45] Addie Hamilton, Interview by author, Estill, SC, November 12, 2014.
[46] Bishop James Jackson, Interview by author, Tarboro, SC, November 24, 2014.
[47] Bishop James Jackson, Interview by author, Tarboro, SC, November 24, 2014.

"had to wear boots and wade water because the road [to the church] would be flooded."[48] She recalled that since, "the road was real bad . . . most people didn't come in there. But those who came in . . . would have to wear their boots through the water, and [they] carried their shoes. Then, when they got to church they take off their boots and put on the church shoes."[49]

The church may have been inconveniently situated off the main road, but Sister Williams had a unique way of gathering her congregation. Betty Fisher said that just before church time Sister Francena would go outside and begin to beat a large drum, signaling that worship was about to begin. Fisher, who grew up in nearby Ridgeland, has vivid recollections of the one the locals called Mother Frances. She remembers that Sister Francena "lived out there in a little shack of a place that had no electricity; it didn't even have glass windows. It had wooden shutters to close it off."[50] She also remembers that the block church was equally meager since, "They had church by a kerosene lamp" in those early days of existence.[51]

But, even in such a humble environment, the little congregation not only survived, but in many ways it thrived. As is often the case, the internal fire that is present in leadership set the temperature in the room. Hamilton recalls that regular gatherings were, "like a Holy Ghost revival. People didn't worry about the time . . . because of the Holy Ghost."[52] Even if getting to the church house were not an easy task, people "would come out of the woods to get to the highway and then walk back through the woods to get to the

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[48] Addie Hamilton, Interview by author, Estill, SC, November 12, 2014.
[49] Addie Hamilton, Interview by author, Estill, SC, November 12, 2014.
[50] Betty Fisher, Interview by author, Lancaster, SC, August 23, 2012.
[51] Betty Fisher, Interview by author, Lancaster, SC, August 23, 2012.
[52] Addie Hamilton, Interview by author, Estill, SC, November 12, 2014.

church."[53] Consequently, they usually had only one Sunday service, but it would last until mid-afternoon. Hamilton continued, "We never had a church full of people, but I'll tell you one thing, the Lord was always there."[54]

Everyone that ever met sisters Francena and Mary lights up when they hear their names mentioned. "If there was ever two save people, it was them," Hamilton said.[55] She still gets excited when she remembers Sister Francena jumping and dancing from one pew to another under the anointing of the Holy Ghost. She also recalls the times when Sister Williams would wrap both arms around the red-hot stove used for heat. When she would finally release the stove, there would be no burns or blisters on her skin whatsoever. This was viewed as a sign of the presence and favor of God on her life and ministry.

The fruit from the Tarboro church would be abundant, including a lineage of two additional churches. In the early 1970s, Tarboro Deacon, Leroy White organized a church in the nearby community of Woodsville. Soon thereafter, his sister-in-law, Veronica White planted a new church 130 miles NE in Turbeville. One of the greatest honors a minister has is that they not only bear spiritual fruit but that the "fruit should remain" (John 15:16 KJV).

Lastly, current Tarboro pastor, Bishop James Jackson, and his brother, Richard, long-term pastor at Woodsville, both grew up in the shadow of Sister Williams. The continuing ministry of the three aforementioned churches, combined with the litany of clergymen that came from the small Tarboro community are the living legacy to the influence and ministry of Sister Francena William. Unfortunately, the Tarboro Church remained the only black congregation/church in South Carolina for nearly 15 years.

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[53] Addie Hamilton, Interview by author, Estill, SC, November 12, 2014.
[54] Addie Hamilton, Interview by author, Estill, SC, November 12, 2014.
[55] Addie Hamilton, Interview by author, Estill, SC, November 12, 2014.

A disproportionate number of the founding pioneers of the black churches in South Carolina were powerful women of faith such as Francena Williams, Colene Zellars, Elizabeth Gary, Eva Gilmore, and Carrie Cureton. These ladies were the cornerstones of local churches in Tarboro, Ware Shoals, Sumter, Rock Hill, and countless other locations.[56]

In 1953, Bishop Allard Flowers was serving his District Overseer and pastor of the white congregation in Sumter when he officiated the organizational ceremony for a new black church in the city. While Flowers was the officiant over the organizational ceremony, these lady champions, especially Carrie Cureton and Elizabeth Gray, had already laid the groundwork. Sister Cureton and her children would drive from Rock Hill to Sumter to assist in tilling the land, and planting the seeds. When the earliest fruit ripened and the church was established, Leroy Peak was brought in as pastor. Sister Gary remained active in Evangelism and pastoral work, and would eventually return to Sumter where she pastored for several years.

Carrie Stroud Cureton was the spiritual heroine at Rock Hill. She was born in nearby Chester County in 1905. After marrying Deacon Amos Cureton in 1922, the couple moved to High Point, NC where they joined the Church of God.[57] Divine providence was at work in High Point for it was there Carrie would meet Pastor Ralph Scotton[58] and be mentored by Evangelist Maggie Jones. Also during this time, she accepted her call to preach.

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[56] "Although the CGP does not ordain women, they have one of the highest percentages of female ministers who serve as pastors and state, national, and international leaders" (*The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, 541).

[57] In North Carolina, many black pastors and churches aligned with A.J. Tomlinson after the 1923 dispersion. The Curetons would be among that group.

[58] Scotton would later organize the Black work in Rock Hill after the Curetons returned to SC.

In 1938 she returned to South Carolina and settled in Rock Hill. Her passion for God and the Church of God inspired her to begin prayer meetings and Bible study under a plum tree in her backyard. [59] It seems appropriate that the group met under a plum tree because spiritual fruit would soon ripen.

In 1949, Ralph Scotton, Sister Cureton's former pastor from High Point, was working out of the General Headquarters offices in Cleveland Tennessee, serving as a Field Secretary and Home Mission Worker. In an effort to establish new black congregations and plant churches, Bishop Tomlinson had created the staff position called "Field Secretary."[60] These appointees were expansions of the General Overseer's office whose primary responsibilities included home mission work (church planting), as well as personally representing the Overseer in areas and at times when he was unavailable. While the office carried no designations regarding racial identity, the General Overseer usually had at least one African-American and one Hispanic in these positions. Consequently, if there was a problem or an opportunity presented within the ethnic communities, the corresponding Field Secretary would be discharged to address the situation.

Accordingly, Scotton, most likely at the invitation of the Curetons, conducted an extended revival in Rock Hill. It was not unusual for such church planting revivals to continue for one or two months and such was the Rock Hill venture. After several weeks of tent meetings, a new Black church was organized with Deacon Cauthen accepted as the

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[59] Carrie Cureton was also instrumental in the birthing of African-American churches in Camden, Chester, Lancaster, and Sumter, SC. – Historical data supplies by Pastor Sylvia Staten, Pastor of the Rock Hill, Spruce Street COGOP.

[60] In 1939 a white field secretary was added to assist the general overseer. In 1941 a black field secretary joined the staff, and a Hispanic field secretary completed the group in 1953. See: *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, 541.

first member.[61] With churches in Tarboro in the South, Rock Hill in the Northern Piedmont, and Sumter in the mid-state, the Trinity of black congregations, while numerically few, were nonetheless strategically dispersed across the state.

In 1950 Alexander Gilmore was appointed as pastor of the black congregation in Rock Hill. A native of North Carolina, he was described as tall, light skinned, and handsome. Former General Overseer, Fred S. Fisher, who began his pastoral ministry in South Carolina in the early 1950s described Gilmore as, "a preaching machine"[62] no doubt attesting to his pulpit mastery.

He was followed in 1953 by Pastor Leroy Peak, also a North Carolinian. Unfortunately, the church remained numerically small, partially due to the fact that according to Roosevelt Ashford, Peak never moved to Rock Hill, but commuted from NC.[63]

Sister Cureton would succeed Leroy Peak in 1954. However, her fingerprints were already covering the ministry. While pastors Gilmore and Peak may have driven in periodically for services, Cureton and her family were actively laboring to strengthen the work. With little to no financial support, she saved enough money to purchase a small parcel of land for a future sanctuary.

When her son James returned from WWII, he attended Clinton College in Rock Hill on the GI Bill where he studied brick masonry. When he completed his courses his mother convinced him that he could build the new church. A machine was purchased to

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[61] A prerequisite for organizing a new church in the COGOP, was to have at least one new member join – someone who was not a member at any existing church. Thus, the Curetons could not be the first members, but most assuredly transferred their existing membership into the newly formed group. Deacon Cauthen may have been a member of a non-COGOP church and was thus covenanted to be a founding member.

[62] Fred Fisher, Interview by author, Lancaster, SC, August 23, 2012.

[63] Roosevelt Ashford, Interviewed by author, Rock Hill, SC, November 4, 2014.

mix mortar and the Cureton family, including all the children, began the backbreaking labor of constructing the church on Carroll Street. In 1952 the beautiful little block building was completed. This church, built as an 'on the job training' exercise by James Cureton, with a workforce consisting of his parents and some children, has been a spiritual lighthouse in the black community for over 60 years.[64]

Frank Scotton succeeded Carrie Cureton in 1955, moving to Rock Hill where he stayed four years.[65] Then, in 1959 Robert and Helen Moore arrived from Lincolnton, North Carolina to assume the pastorate. It appeared that the Moore's would provide the long-term stability for the fledgling church. Unfortunately, things unexpectedly changed in 1964 when Brother Moore was tragically killed in an automotive accident. As in all such tragedies, questions arise as to the providence of God. Why would He take the life of someone who had an obvious passion for the community and people?

While most such questions have no conclusive answer, some clarity is gained when viewing the events in hindsight. Brother Moore's daughter, Geraldine, was married to an energetic and anointed young minister, Roosevelt Ashford, and the story of Rock Hill would soon become the story of this man named Roosevelt. Actually, the entire future of the black church work in South Carolina would forever be changed as the dark clouds of death were replaced with a passionate light of new life.

Roosevelt's story was typical of his generation. He recalls, "I was going out every evening at some club and doing what sinners were doing."[66] However, providentially, a

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[64] In the early 1990s, under the leadership of Bishop Roosevelt Ashford, the Carroll Street congregations purchased a newer facility on Spruce Street. However, other church groups have continued to use the Carroll Street building.

[65] In 1956 Carrie Cureton migrated to Long Island, NY where she planted the COGOP on Fulton Street in Brooklyn, NY.

[66] Roosevelt Ashford, Interviewed by author, Rock Hill, SC, November 4, 2014.

new church had been organized in Siler City, NC and his mother and sisters had joined. Although, Roosevelt was a rambunctious teenager who was more interested in fun and friends, his mother had other aspirations for him. Ashford said, "My mother came and asked me to take her to Asheboro because Brother E.L. Jones was there. But, I didn't want to go, and I told her . . . But she said if I didn't take her she would take the car away from me. So, I consented."[67]

Although Roosevelt did not experience a spiritual conversion that night when Ed Jones preached, he did acknowledge that something indeed happened in his spirit. Soon thereafter, Billy Siler held a home prayer service in his mother's house. That night he knelt in the living room and accepted the Lord's free gift of salvation. His best recollection was that he was 17 or 18 years old and, "From that point [he] made an about-face and got involved in church."[68] He said, "There was . . . four or five of us that got saved at that time. And, we got on fire for the Lord."[69]

Before long he was preaching the gospel. So complete was his spiritual transformation he redirected his youthful exuberance toward church planting efforts; first in Liberty North Carolina, then in Chapel Hill. He was one of a group of young champions who would become spiritual giants, men like E.L. Jones, Billy Siler, and Benjamin Lawrence. These anointed preachers and charismatic leaders, possessing a burning passion for Christ and the Church of God, multitasked as Evangelists, church planters, and pastors.

After early pastoral success in NC, in 1960 Roosevelt would leave North Carolina to pastor the church in Cleveland Tennessee. While in Cleveland, Roosevelt remained committed to revival work and church planting ventures. In 1964 he began an

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[67] Roosevelt Ashford, Interviewed by author, Rock Hill, SC, November 4, 2014.
[68] Roosevelt Ashford, Interviewed by author, Rock Hill, SC, November 4, 2014.
[69] Roosevelt Ashford, Interviewed by author, Rock Hill, SC, November 4, 2014.

evangelistic crusade in Ringo, Georgia. The revival was successful as many young people, "were seeking the Lord."[70] He said, "Oh man, the young people were screaming and crying and we had a revival going on."[71] But, at the height of the meetings, Georgia Overseer, M.S. Curry, came bringing sad news. Roosevelt's brother-in-law had gotten killed when his livestock truck crashed and burned. About the same time his father-in-law, Robert Moore died tragically in a traffic accident. Adding to the heartbreak, former pastor Alexander Gilmore who was traveling in ministry with Brother Moore also died in the crash while his wife, Eva, was left comatose.[72]

This multiplication of catastrophes caused Roosevelt to close his promising revival. All of this happened just a few days before the convening of the 1964 General Assembly,[73] at which time, South Carolina Overseer, L.V. Jones approached Roosevelt about succeeding his father-in-law as pastor of the Rock Hill church. Reflecting on this, Ashford concluded, "With everything going on in our family we felt like perhaps the Lord was orchestrating things in bringing us to South Carolina."[74]

Inheriting a membership of less than ten souls, the Ashford's nevertheless approach their new assignment with great vigor.[75] A tireless worker, he set about his task of increasing the membership in Rock Hill. Additionally, ever the church planter he was eager to plow the fertile soil of previously uncultivated fields.

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[70] Roosevelt Ashford, Interviewed by author, Rock Hill, SC, November 4, 2014.
[71] Roosevelt Ashford, Interviewed by author, Rock Hill, SC, November 4, 2014.
[72] Gilmore was working as a 'Home Mission' worker and living in Rock Hill at the time of his death. Eva Gilmore miraculously came out of her comma after Roosevelt and others prayed for her. She resumed a very successful Evangelistic ministry for many years thereafter.
[73] The 59th Annual Assembly was held in Cleveland, TN, September 8-14, 1964.
[74] Roosevelt Ashford, Interviewed by author, Rock Hill, SC, November 4, 2014.
[75] In 1964 the Rock Hill black congregation consisted of Brother Cauthen, Sister Buckson, Sister Roseboro, and Sister Moore. –Pastor Sylvia Staten, e-mail message to author, September 4, 2014.

Ashford said, "When we got here in Rock Hill we went to Winnsboro and Brother Foyce Mackey, his wife, and her mother - and some children [were there]."[76] By this time Barney Trogdon had replaced E.L. Jones as Home Mission Worker (Missionary) and he went to Winnsboro and conducted several weeks of tent revival. Afterwards, with the consent the District Overseer Cletus Harris, and newly appointed State Overseer G.A. Wilson, Ashford organized the new church, "even with such a small number of people."[77] Clarence Gilmore, from Durham, NC was appointed as pastor. With only a few parishioners he chose not to relocate but commuted back and forth from Durhum each week to conduct services.

Soon Ashford was given the duel responsibilities of pastor and State Field Secretary. The following year, he began holding services in a rented home in Great Falls. After meeting regularly for several weeks, he explained the teachings of the church to all who were interested. Afterwards, several presented themselves for membership and the new church was set in order. Sister Luella Davidson lived in Charlotte but commuted to serve as pastor.

The gloriously inglorious story conveys the dichotomy that existed during this time in South Carolina. The prevailing culture in the South discouraged interaction between the races, often under threat of legal penalty. As stated earlier, the COGOP was somewhat the exception to the rule, being far more accepting of and embracing of differing cultures than other Pentecostal denominations. However, when comparisons are made, it must be acknowledged that the bar had been set very low. When discussing racial equality and

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[76] Roosevelt Ashford, Interviewed by author, Rock Hill, SC, November 4, 2014.
[77] According to Roosevelt Ashford Foyce and Gertrude Mackey, Nora B. Coleman, George and Elise Miller, Sister Jackson and Sister Surrant were the founding members at Winnsboro.

inclusivism among Southern Pentecostals, the COGOP was, in effect, only less prejudiced than her contemporaries.

Nowhere is the gloriously inglorious dichotomy demonstrated more clearly than in the village of Ware Shoals in the mid-1960s. Colleen Zellars, a devout black lady, became acquainted with white Evangelist Mable Farris and Bessie Parker who introduced her to the doctrines of the Church of God. Zellars excitedly received their message and sought to join the Church. Bessie Parker's husband, T.C., was the pastor of the Ware Shoals church and told Zellars that since his congregation was white it was not possible for her to join. Thus, the inglorious part of the church's history is revealed. While receiving a black member into a white congregation would have caused immeasurable difficulties in the community, such action could have been a marvelous testimony to the entire society had there only been sufficient boldness and integrity to have broken the racial stigmas.

Nonetheless, these were people with genuine Christian love for each other, and thus, we discover the glorious part of their history. Working with available resources, and in accordance with his best wisdom, pastor Parker started a mission in Sister Zellar's home.[78] He contacted Roosevelt Ashford who came and conducted a house revival. This resulted in a new church plant in 1966. Ashford would leave Rock Hill for one year to pastor the new church in Ware Shoals. This also freed him up to devote more attention to his work as Field Secretary (Home Mission Worker) for the state.

Sister Zellars found a parcel of land on Shady Grove Road that was owned by a man known in the community simply as Jimmy the Greek. He held the mortgage, and she made the payments each month. However, when she would make a land payment, he

[78] Marion Enwright, Interviewed by author, Ware Shoals, SC, July 16, 2014.

would immediately return the money to her, stating that, "ever since he had owned that property it looked like a church belonged there."[79] Hence, a white businessman effectively donated the land for the new black congregation.

Additionally, E.V. and Frances Cobb, ardent church planters who happened to be white, stepped forward to contribute funding. The Cobbs cashed in their life insurance policy and bought the building materials for the new construction at Shady Grove. Consequently, a glorious part of the inglorious story is that a white pastor, a white businessman, and a white church planting couple joined together to ensure that the black people in Ware Shoals would have a place of worship. The continuing remarkable racial unity was evidenced in the mid-1970s when the Carol Ross and the Baker family were the white members in the region to join a predominantly black congregation.[80]

This pattern for the gloriously inglorious story repeated itself in somewhat less dramatic form all across South Carolina. Roosevelt Ashford would become one of the most admired ministers in South Carolina irrespective of race. His genuine humility provided him with the perfect temperament to work as freely among whites as blacks.

Another example of the cooperation and mutual respect existing among the differing cultures was displayed when a new church was planted in Walhalla in 1969.[81] By this time Ashford had retuned to pastor the Rock Hill church, but would drive to Walhalla each week to 'preach out' the new church work. He recently asked himself, "How in the world did I do it all?"[82] The answer is manifold, even beyond the enabling

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[79] Marion Enwright, Interviewed by author, Ware Shoals, SC, July 16, 2014.
[80] Ware Shoals pastoral honor roll: 1966-Roosevelt Ashford; 1967- Geraldine Ashford; 1968-69-Clearance Gilmore; 1969-73 Ernest Richmond; 1973-2001-Colleen Zellars; 2001-present R. Marion Enwright.
[81] The Walhalla church is presently called Richland.
[82] Walhalla is a three-hour automobile drive from Rock Hill.

grace and empowerment of God. Firstly, his wife Geraldine assumed much of the responsibilities of the Rock Hill pastorate in his absence. Secondly, he lived with Lewis Harrison (a white man) for about three months while he labored in Walhalla. This arrangement allowed him a place to rest and from which to function. The same white man, Lewis Harrison, became the initial pastor of the new black congregation after it set in order. While outstanding black leaders such as David Sims, Ernest Richman, and James Shiflet later continued this vital ministry, it can not be discounted that the church was birthed through the cooperative and unified efforts of black and white, Ashford and Harrison.

With the addition of two new churches, one in Anderson and one in Ninety-Six the period of remarkable growth was digressing by the mid-1970s. However, almost all of those original churches are still in existence to date, continually offering, not only a wealth of ethnic culture, but also providing vitally important ministry within the region. Some churches sprang up but were unsustainable. Others have relocated such as the Great Falls church to Lancaster. The church at Chester has teetered back and forth from being predominantly one race to the other. It is presently an exceptional predominantly black congregation with black leadership.

The champions of the growth era have been listed earlier in this chapter but could be enlarged to include countless other fateful warriors. In most regions, the churches would have found it more difficult to exist had it not been for cooperative efforts from their white cohorts. While it is certainly true that much more could have been done to promote racial equality, it would be intellectual dishonesty to neglect the acts of Christian brotherhood that dot the historical scenery of the old South state.

In the present economy, the historical perceptions are greatly affected by generational prisms that bend the colors that enlighten understanding. Among the older members of traditional black churches, those who have been around the COGOP for 50 years or longer, justice and equality issues are viewed through the lenses of their respective times. That generation well remembers a day when they were required by law to use separate water fountains, sit in the back of the bus, and were even discouraged from looking a white person in the eyes. However, they also remember the time when they would gather together with their white brothers and sisters in Assemblies, Conventions, and other arenas of fellowship they were greeted not only with a handshake and a hug, but more than likely with a 'holy kiss.' To them, the Church was the only place they ever got a glimpse of true personhood.

Former Field Secretary, Bishop E.L. Jones once said, "I did not march with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. because I trusted the Church of God to do right!"[83] To this, COGOP historian Adrian Varlack added, "I think that summed it up for most of our Black brothers at the time."[84]

Conversely, for the younger generation that has grown up with altered expectations, their vision is shaded by their times and experiences. The tremendous advancements in the area of human rights has given them a vision of America that far exceeds that of their grandparents. Consequently, many see the lack of advancement opportunities for blacks in the Church as a sign of inequality. While it is true that there are black leaders at every level of denominational hierarchy in South Carolina, many lament

[83] Adrian Varlack, e-mail message to author, January 8, 2015.
[84] Adrian Varlack, e-mail message to author, January 8, 2015.

that there are too few in number and that opportunities for advancement are extremely limited for people of color.[85]

However, an overwhelming preponderance of Southerners now having experienced integrated schools, jobs, and neighborhoods the necessity for segregated churches is diminishing. There are few if any totally white or totally black congregation remaining. Predominantly black churches appeal to Hispanics and whites that enjoy a freer, more spirited form of worship. Predominantly white churches are reaching a different demographic who enjoy shorter service times and more sedate worship. Thus, almost 80 years after Francena Williams stepped out in faith and planted the Church of God flag in the rich soil of Jasper County, the gloriously inglorious saga continues in South Carolina but in a direction that pastor Francena Williams and District Overseer J.E. Evans could have never envisioned.

[85] Roosevelt Ashford was appointed as the first District Overseer in South Carolina in the early 1990s and Bishop James Jackson has served in that position for many years. North Carolina, with a larger percentage of historical black churches, became the first southern state in the COGOP to have a black State Overseer in 2010 when Bishop Jeff Davis was appointed.

CHAPTER 8. THE GENERATION OF STAGNATION AND DECLINE

The first generation is marked by growth.
The second generation is marked by entrenchment.
The third generation is marked by decline.
– Dennis Bratcher[1]

The period of rapid growth and expansionism for the Church of God of Prophecy reached its apex in 1973. The years of tremendous progress that had been experienced under the leadership of State Overseers E.A. McDonald, L.V. Jones, G.A. Wilson, and M.S. Curry saw the evolution from six storefront congregations in 1935 to 138 total churches in 1973. Similarly membership grew from approximately 100 statewide to over 4400 during the same span of time.

Table 3: Statistical Data For the COGOP from 1960-1973

Year	Overseer	Churches	Growth	Membership	Growth	Source
1960	E.A. McDonald	84	–	2150	–	55th Assembly Minutes
1961	L.V. Jones	86	2	2286	136	56th Assembly Minutes
1962	L.V. Jones	92	6	2143	-143	57th Assembly Minutes
1963	L.V. Jones	96	4	2198	55	58th Assembly Minutes
1964	L.V. Jones	106	10	2345	147	59th Assembly Minutes
1965	G.A. Wilson	105	-1	2379	34	60th Assembly Minutes
1966	G.A. Wilson	109	4	2612	233	61st Assembly Minutes
1967	G.A. Wilson	109	0	2773	161	62nd Assembly Minutes
1968	G.A. Wilson	117	8	3008	235	63rd Assembly Minutes
1969	M.S. Curry	122	5	3131	123	64th Assembly Minutes
1970	M.S. Curry	127	5	3458	327	65th Assembly Minutes
1971	M.S. Curry	126	-1	3775	317	66th Assembly Minutes
1972	M.S. Curry	132	6	4060	285	67th Assembly Minutes
1973	M.S. Curry	138	6	4417	357	68th Assembly Minutes

[1] Dennis Bratcher, "The Third Generation: Nehemiah and the Question of Identity," Christian Resource Institute, March 25, 2013, accessed November 25, 2014, http://www.crivoice.org/thirdgen.html.

McDonald's record alone was remarkable. During his 25 year administration the number of churches grew from six to 84,[2] as aggregate membership increased from less than 100 to 2150. While many wondered if the church would continue its earlier success when McDonald was transferred to Alabama in 1960, their worries proved groundless. Over the 13-year period following his departure, South Carolina maintained a 3.9% annual increase in number of churches and a 5.7% growth rate in membership.[3] Had the COGOP been able to maintain that ratio over the subsequent years there would presently be over 600 churches and 40,000 members in South Carolina. Sadly, that was not the case.

While there were some increases in statistical data from 1973-1991, the rates were meager compared to previous years. The total number of churches increased to 150, a gain of 12 churches in 18 years. During the same span of time, discounting an unexplainable spike in 1975 and 76, membership totals grew by a paltry 413. In comparison, during M.S. Curry's highly successful tenure (1968-73), South Carolina experienced additions of 21 churches and 1,409 members.

The reality is that the four decades of exceptional expansion and growth (1935-1973) were followed by a generation of stagnation and decline. A simple comparison of data from 1973 to 2010 tells the story. At the conclusion of Curry's term (1973) official records showed 138 churches and 4,417 members.[4] However, the 2010 Assembly

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[2] Shepard and Shepard, *My Adventures With God*, 211.
[3] Numerically, the COGOP in SC grew from 84 churches in 1960 to 138 in 1973. During the same time frame membership totals grew from 2150 to 4417.
[4] *Minutes of the 68th Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1973), 39.

Minutes[5] listed only 120 churches and 4,273 members, exposing a decrease of 18 churches and 144 members over the 37 years following Curry's administration.[6] (See Table 4)

Table 4: Statistical Data For the COGOP from 1973-2010

Year	Overseer	Churches	Growth	Membership	Growth	Source
1973	M.S. Curry	138	6	4417	357	68th Assembly Minutes
1974	M.L. Hartley	141	3	4511	94	69th Assembly Minutes
1975	M.L. Hartley	141	0	5128	617	70th Assembly Minutes
1976	Howard J. Hunt	141	0	5816	688	71st Assembly Minutes
1977	Howard J. Hunt	139	-2	4798	-1018	72nd Assembly Minutes
1978	Howard J. Hunt	142	3	4798	0	73rd Assembly Minutes
1979	Hubert J. Vicars	143	1	4688	-110	74th Assembly Minutes
1980	Hubert J. Vicars	145	2	4721	33	75th Assembly Minutes
1981	Hubert J. Vicars	146	1	4756	35	76th Assembly Minutes
1982	Hubert J. Vicars	146	0	4886	130	77th Assembly Minutes
1983	Harper Hunter	148	2	4920	34	78th Assembly Minutes
1984	Harper Hunter	147	-1	4872	-48	79th Assembly Minutes
1985	Fred S. Fisher	145	-2	4891	19	80th Assembly Minutes
1986	Fred S. Fisher	146	1	4903	12	81st Assembly Minutes
1987	Fred S. Fisher	147	1	4925	22	82nd Assembly Minutes
1988	Fred S. Fisher	149	2	4961	36	83rd Assembly Minutes
1989	Fred S. Fisher	149	0	4971	10	84th Assembly Minutes
1990	Fred S. Fisher	150	1	4906	-65	85th Assembly Minutes
1991	Fred S. Fisher	150	0	4830	-76	86th Assembly Minutes
1992	Richard E. Davis	146	4	4745	-85	87th Assembly Minutes
1994	Richard E. Davis	137	-9	4680	-65	88th Assembly Minutes
1996	Ray Payne	134	-3	4676	-4	89th Assembly Minutes
1998	Ray Payne	129	-5	4671	-5	90th Assembly Minutes
2000	Ray Payne	130	1	4637	-34	91st Assembly Minutes
2002	Kenneth Baker	127	-3	4352	-285	92nd Assembly Minutes
2004	Kenneth Baker	126	-1	4412	60	93rd Assembly Minutes
2006	Kenneth Baker	123	-3	4330	-82	94th Assembly Minutes
2008	Kenneth Baker	119	-4	4165	-165	95th Assembly Minutes
2010	Tim Coalter	120	1	4273	108	96st Assembly Minutes

[5] *Church of God of Prophecy Minutes of the 96th International Assembly* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2010), 152.

[6] This downward trend in number of churches continues (115 in 2014), but there has been a noticeable increase in membership numbers since 2010 (up to 4765).

The question ensues: How did the COGOP in South Carolina, beginning in 1973, lose the momentum created during the previous generation? The answer is not simple and like an onion, there is more than one layer to be peeled away. A possible approach to gaining clarity is to break down the era and view the related segments in a holistic manner, layer upon layer, and image upon image.

Even as shorelines are shaped by the rise and fall of the oceans, combined with occasional storms, weather patterns, climate changes, and the inevitable human element, a multiplicity of facets contribute to shape families, nations, businesses, as well as church groups. Thus, in order to understand the pattern of decline in the COGOP beginning in 1973 one must factor in possible contributing factors. Not the least of these was the extreme social and cultural upheaval that ushered in fundamental changes in America in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s. Additionally, consideration should be given to the tenor of the American religious landscape during the period. Next, much can be learned by reviewing the repetitive historical patterns related to "the natural development of civilizations, institutions, business organizations, and . . . churches."[7] Finally, it is necessary to systematically break down the in-house activities within the COGOP during the era, especially as they relate to events in South Carolina.

Anyone coming to age during the decades of the 60s and 70s can attest to the cultural turbulence that marked the times. The years of harmony and prosperity that had followed America's victory in World War II and to a lesser degree the Korean conflict, was being eroded and replaced by a protracted era of disillusionment and confusion.

The 1970s were actually a continuation of the previous decade as many of the cultural changes that were birthed in the 1960s were now budding into full-blown teenage

[7] D. Wayne Ammons, *About My Father's Business* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2014), 36.

insurrection. The seeds of rebellion found fertile soil on the campuses of America's colleges and universities. "Grayson Kirk, the 64-year-old president of Columbia, denounced the younger generation's disrespect for established authority. "Our young people," Kirk declared, "in disturbing numbers, appear to reject all forms of authority, from whatever source derived . . . I know of no time in our history when the gap between the generations has been wider or more potentially dangerous."[8]

Realistically, in hindsight, who could have expected a different attitude from a nation that was seeing its very foundations shaken? Arguably, the greatest living symbols of hope for America in the 1960s were John F. Kennedy, his brother Robert, and the great Civil Rights pioneer Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Remarkably, in less than five years all three were tragically removed from the American landscape by the viciousness of assassin's bullets. (President John Kennedy died November 22, 1963; Dr. Martin Luther King died April 4, 1968; and Presidential candidate Robert Kennedy died June 6, 1968.)

Less than two years after the murder of the younger Kennedy, the nation watched in horror on May 4, 1970 as members of the Ohio National Guard panicked and fired into a group of anti-war demonstrators at Kent State University, killing four and wounding nine students. Nothing seems more emblematic of a nation divided than this tragic event in which American youth stood catastrophically on opposite sides of the ideological gulf. Dr. Chris H. Lewis, who characterized the 70s as, "a decade of disillusion, cynicism, bitterness, and anger"[9] concluded that it could only be understood, by "examining it in the

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[8] Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 9. See also: Jules Witcover, *The Year the Dream Died: Revisiting 1968 in America* (New York, NY: Warner Books, ©1997), 187-90.

[9] Chris Lewis, "The 1970s and America's Crisis of Confidence," Sewall Academic Program; University of Colorado at Boulder, August 7, 2002, accessed December 07, 2014, http://www.colorado.edu/AmStudies/lewis/2010/anxiety.htm#Trends.

context of the aftermath of the Vietnam War and Watergate and the Cold War."[10] He concludes that these and similar events "damaged Americans' faith in their government and their leaders."[11]

Hebert Hoover, the 31st president of the US was quoted in the New York Times (August 9, 1964) as saying, "When there is a lack of honor in government, the morals of the whole people are poisoned." There was probably never a period in US history in which this statement was more applicable than the early 1970s. For example, in 1973 Vice President Spiro Agnew was under investigation by the US Attorney's office in Maryland on charges of tax fraud, extortion, conspiracy, all resulting from allegedly accepting bribes totaling more than $100,000 during his years in public office. On October 10th a plea bargain agreement allowed him to plead nolo contendere (no contest) to the charges with the stipulation that he would immediately resign his office as Vice President.

As tragic as Agnew's ordeal was, it paled in comparison to his Presidential counterpart, Richard Nixon. While most working middle-class Americans probably never understood the full dimensions of Watergate related activities and the resulting investigations, they did understand that Nixon had overseen a corrupt administration while sanctioning wiretaps, break-ins, and other forms of espionage against his political enemies. In and of itself the Watergate activities were probably not much different than the shenanigans of Nixon's predecessors.[12] What proved to be more damaging to Nixon's chances of survival were his attempts to cover up the illegal operation.

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[10] Lewis, "The 1970s and America's Crisis of Confidence," .http://www.colorado.edu/AmStudies/lewis/2010/anxiety.htm#Trends.
[11] Lewis, "The 1970s and America's Crisis of Confidence," .http://www.colorado.edu/AmStudies/lewis/2010/anxiety.htm#Trends.
[12] See David Frum, *How We Got Here: The 70's, the Decade That Brought You Modern Life (For Better or Worse)* (New York, NY: Basic Books, ©2000), 26-27.

Subsequently, any remaining sense of national innocence was eroded with the revelation of secret tape recordings of Oval Office meetings that once made public exposed Nixon as a profane, and hateful Head of State. Explicably, the national mood shifted from hope and trust to cynicism. It was inevitable that the mutable attitude of distrust of authority symbols would eventually impact the church.

In November of 1973 Nixon stood before an audience of newspaper executives and declared the now famous statement, "I am not a crook." However, within days of his statement an ABC News poll found that 59% of Americans did not believe "much of what the president says."[13] Realizing that his political base had forsaken him and that he had lost the trust of the American people, on August 9, 1974 Nixon resigned from office. In his resignation address from the Oval Office, in a subdued voice he said, "By taking this action, I hope that I will have hastened the start of the process of healing which is so desperately needed in America."

Regrettably, the healing Nixon hoped for did not follow his resignation. Instead, "Americans were angry, bitter, and disillusioned with their government."[14] But, Washington insider and columnist, David Frum, observed, "Some blame Watergate for [the] abrupt collapse and trust in institutions. [However] the Vietnam War is a more plausible culprit for the loss of trust. The dates are right: 1965 to 1973."[15]

Evidence of the pervasive cynicism and disillusionment is found in the reflective statement later penned by Nixon who said, "No event in American history is more misunderstood than the Vietnam War. It was misreported then, and it is misremembered

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[13] Frum, *How We Got Here,* 26.
[14] Lewis, "The 1970s and America's Crisis of Confidence," .http://www.colorado.edu/AmStudies/lewis/2010/anxiety.htm#Trends.
[15] Frum, *How We Got Here,* 4.

now. Rarely have so many people been so wrong about so much. Never have the consequences of their misunderstanding been so tragic."[16]

The leaking of limited portions of the Pentagon Papers (1967) offered some enlightenment to the actions of leadership, but more questions than answers were generated.[17] By the time the papers were released in entirety, for the American psyche it was a matter of too little too late.

During the years of conflict most Americans could not understand all the intricacies of the war, but they did grasp the fact that there were 58,000 red-bloodied Americans coming home in body bags. And, with at least one third of all military personnel conscripted into service through the draft, every family was subject to be drawn into the battle regardless of their personal convictions or preferences.

David Frum referenced a survey conducted by the University of Michigan in 1958 that found that, "57% of Americans trusted the government in Washington to do the "right thing" most of time; another 14% trusted it to do the "right thing" almost all of the time."[18] This incomprehensible level of trust was vested in authority figures such as "doctors and judges; generals and school teachers; clergymen and presidents of cooperation."[19]

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[16] Bernard Gwertzman, "Books: Vietnam Debate," The New York Times Company, March 28, 1985, accessed December 10, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/1985/03/28/arts/books-vietnam-debate.html. See: Richard M. Nixon, *No More Vietnams* (New York, N.Y.: Avon, 1986, ©1985).
[17] Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara authorized the "Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Vietnam Task Force" better known as the Pentagon Papers, in 1967. Initially, only small portions of the report were leaked to the media, but with incendiary results. Forty years later the full content was released revealing duplicity by every president from Kennedy to Nixon as well as "potentially awkward information about friendly governments." See: Frum, 43.
[18] Frum, *How We Got Here,* 4.
[19] Frum, *How We Got Here,* 4.

Conversely, Frum opines that, "between 1967 and 1981, the United States sank into a miasma of self-doubt from which it has never fully emerged."[20]

In summing up the social and Cultural Revolution that was occurring during the 1960s and 1970s University of Colorado professor, Dr. Chris H. Lewis listed the following trends:

- Increasing divorce rates, with up to one in two marriages ending in divorce.
- A rise in female-headed households caused by these divorces, which forces single women to work to support their families.
- Increasing numbers of women working, both to support their families and try to make up for their family's declining standard of living.
- The increasing breakdown of the family, and a rise in juvenile delinquency.
- The increase in drug-use throughout all levels of society.
- Increasing rise in crime, especially violent crime.
- A rise in premarital sex and couples living together outside of marriage.
- Increasing presence of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in American society.
- Increasing use of sex to sell products.
- Increasing loss of millions and millions of high-paying factory jobs.
- Seventy percent of all new jobs created in the 1970s in low-paying service jobs.
- Increasing numbers of women and children in poverty.
- Ten to fifteen percent inflation per year in the 1970s.
- The real income of American workers fell on average two percent a year each year from 1973 to 1981.[21]

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[20] Frum, *How We Got Here,* 4.

Adding to this disturbing list, Frum reports, "the collapse of educational standards, the disillusion of the ideal of racial equality and the rancorous arguments over special privileges, the discharge of hundreds of thousands of mentally ill people to fend for themselves on the sidewalks . . . and the savaging of America's cities by crime and disorder."[22] Lewis concludes that, "As a result of . . . these changes, many Americans were losing their faith in the American Dream, their society, their government, and their future."[23]

As a denomination with a strong Wesleyan Holiness heritage, the COGOP had purposed to remain "unspotted from the world" (James 1:27 KJV) espousing the biblical injunction to, "come out from among them, and be . . . separate, . . . and touch not the unclean thing" (2 Cor. 6:17 KJV). Nevertheless, the constant exposure to the waves of a toxic environment had to beat adversely upon the church's holiness and socially conservative foundations. Additionally, many of the church's long-held positions such as strict belief in the permanence of the marriage covenant, the necessity of sexual purity (adamantly against premarital, extramarital, and same gender sex relationships), and the obligation to respect and obey those in authority placed the COGOP further outside the perceived social norms as portrayed (and possibly promoted) in much of the mainstream media, especially in its entertainment context.

It cannot be said with certainty whether these drastic cultural and social changes were totally responsible for the concurrent changes in the church world. However, there

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[21] Lewis, "The 1970s and America's Crisis of Confidence," .http://www.colorado.edu/AmStudies/lewis/2010/anxiety.htm#Trends.
[22] Frum, *How We Got Here,* 350.
[23] Lewis, "The 1970s and America's Crisis of Confidence," .http://www.colorado.edu/AmStudies/lewis/2010/anxiety.htm#Trends.

were trends that developed during the era that continued in some form or another throughout the next generation.

Reporting on a recent Gallop poll, Frank Newport said, "The most religious era of the past 74 years -- at least based on [the] measure of weekly church attendance -- was from the mid to late 1950s into the early 1960s, when at some point, almost half (49%) of American adults said they had attended religious service in the past seven days."[24] However, Newport continued, "Since the early 1960s weekly church attendance has settled down generally to range between 40% and 45%."[25] The poll graphically shows an almost 10% decline in US church attendance from the high in 1958 of 49% to the low of 40% in 1973.[26]

When viewed myopically, the 40% average attendance within the American population does not paint a disturbing picture. But, when measured against the post WWII high, inarguably the decline runs concurrent with the turbulent 1960s and 70s.

Tobin Grant, writing for Religion News Service at Corner of Church and State combine data from five separate Gallup polls to reveal 60 years of religious decline in America.[27] He noted that, "During the post-war, baby-booming 1950s, there was a revival of religion. Indeed, some at the time considered it a third great awakening. Then came the

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[24] Frank Newport, "In U.S., Four in 10 Report Attending Church in Last Week," Gallup, December 24, 2013, accessed November 27, 2014, http://www.gallup.com/poll/166613/four-report-attending-church-last-week.aspx.

[25] Frank Newport, "In U.S., Four in 10 Report Attending Church in Last Week," Gallup, December 24, 2013, accessed November 27, 2014, http://www.gallup.com/poll/166613/four-report-attending-church-last-week.aspx.

[26] According to Gallup data the U.S. average percentage of church attendance has maintained a 40% average since the early 1970s with a yearly high of 44% in 2000 and low of 38% in 1996.

[27] Grant's research incorporated the 5 measures of American religion that Gallup reports annually: (1) Decline of Religious Identity; (2) Decline of Church Attendance; (3) Decline of Membership; (4) Declined of Religion's Importance in Life; and (5) Decline of Religion's Relevance for Today. See: http:// tobingrant.religionnews.com/2014/08/01/five-signs-great-decline-religion-america-gallup-graphs-church/

societal changes of the 1960s, which included a questioning of religious institutions. The resulting decline in religion stopped by the end of the 1970s, when religiosity remained steady."[28] Regrettably, while the percentage of Americans attending worship each week remained relatively constant from the mid-1970s through the mid-1990s, Grant chronicles a significant declension since 1994. He observed that, "Over the past fifteen years . . . religion has once again declined. But this decline is much sharper than the decline of 1960s and 1970s. Church attendance and prayer is less frequent."[29]

Church growth guru, C. Peter Wagner presented data for denominational growth rates from the mid-1960s through the mid-1980s. These decadal growth rates reveal the big losers and winners of the era. According to Wagner's data the losers from 1965-1987 were: Disciples of Christ -43%; Episcopal -27%; Presbyterian -25%; United Church of Christ -20%; and Methodist -18%. Conversely, the greatest rates of increase from 1967-1987 were: Evangelical Covenant +4%; Southern Baptist +14%; Church of the Nazarene +17%; Seventh Day Adventist +33%; Christian and Missionary Alliance +49%; and Pentecostals +173%.[30] Even though all Pentecostals are grouped together into one category, the figures reflect the tremendous growth of the Pentecostal movement in America during the two decades. So dramatic was the Pentecostal – Charismatic

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[28] Tobin Grant, "The Great Decline: 60 Years of Religion in One Graph," Religion News Service at Corner of Church and State, January 27, 2014, accessed November 24, 2014, http://tobingrant.religionnews.com/2014/01/27/great-decline-religion-united-states-one-graph/.
[29] Tobin Grant, "The Great Decline: 60 Years of Religion in One Graph," Religion News Service at Corner of Church and State, January 27, 2014, accessed November 24, 2014, http://tobingrant.religionnews.com/2014/01/27/great-decline-religion-united-states-one-graph/.
[30] Vincent Synan, "Role of Tongues as Initial Evidence" (lecture, Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA, June 27, 2014).

resurgence that in 1980 American religious historian Peter W. Williams deemed Pentecostalism to be the "popular religious movement" of the 20th century.[31]

According to the World Christian Encyclopedia, from 1970-1985 the number of Protestant Pentecostals increased 133%.[32] However, the great explosion of Pentecostalism came from the Charismatic and Neo-Charismatic movement[33] as the roll of Catholic Pentecostals grew by 900% and Anglicans by 400%.[34]

Amazingly, as general interest in religion was declining, the Pentecostal-Charismatic revival was producing unprecedented numbers. This remarkable explosion was not contained within the United States as worldwide the numbers of Pentecostals grew from 50 million in 1965 to 247 million within 20 years.[35]

While first wave – Classical Pentecostal ministers had long preached about a great Holy Ghost outpouring, this Charismatic revival occurred without their participation. In fact, only the Assemblies of God experience remarkable denominational growth during

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[31] Peter W. Williams, *Popular Religion in America* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1980), 144. See also: James R. Goff and Grant Wacker, eds., *Portraits of a Generation: Early Pentecostal Leaders* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2002), xi.

[32] David B. Barrett, ed., *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Study of Churches and Religions in the Modern World, Ad 1900-2000* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1982), 711.

[33] By 1980 the various groups embracing the Pentecostal experience were categorized as belonging either to the First Wave (classical Pentecostals--churches who had their beginnings in the early 20th century such as the Pentecostal Holiness Church, the Church of God, the Church of God in Christ, the Assemblies of God, and the Church of God of Prophecy), the Second Wave (Charismatics in the historic mainline churches, most notably Episcopal, Catholic, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, and Presbyterian), or the Third Wave (Neo-Pentecostal's or Neo-Charismatics). -- The Neo-Pentecostal groups have no traditional Pentecostal or Charismatic denominational connections and cannot be classified as either Pentecostal or Charismatic. See: *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements: Revised and Expanded Edition [new Intl Dict of Pentecostal and]* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Company, 2002), 928.

[34] Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopedia,* 711.

[35] Vincent Synan, "Role of Tongues as Initial Evidence" (lecture, Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA, June 27, 2014).

the period.[36] How could those 'first wave' trailblazers who had carried the Pentecostals torch, endured the persecution, and withstood the shame of the first half of the 20th century not be part of the great outpouring? The answer is not complicated.

Firstly, most classical Pentecostal groups had roots in the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition. They were holiness churches before they became Pentecostals and never fully deserted their heredities. Conversely, the Holy Spirit outpouring of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s sprang up without Holiness pedigrees. Secondly, Charismatics often remained in their mainline churches and found various places, and means for expressing their newfound Spiritualism. Consequently, there was no mass exodus from the mainline churches to the classical Holiness/Pentecostal groups. Additionally, when many of the young people who were part of the Jesus movement began to experience Pentecost, they brought their music, dress, and cultural affinity to religious services. However, their expressions of worship were often times not welcome in traditional churches. These were some of the reasons the first wave churches ignored the fruit of the outpourings.

The notable exception was the Assemblies of God denomination that rode the crest of the Renewalist[37] wave. "AG membership growth in the U.S. went from 12.5% in 1962 – 65, to a spectacular 31.7% in 1970 – 75."[38] How was the AG able to bridge the gap

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[36] In recent years the Pentecostal Holiness Church has joined the Assemblies of God experiencing denominational growth. Synan says that beginning in 1993, "the church saw the greatest growth in its history." See: Vinson Synan, "The Pentecostal Holiness Church," IPHC Archives and Research Center, accessed December 19, 2014, http://www.pctii.org/arc/synan.html.

[37] A 10-country survey conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life in 2006 begin using the term 'Renewalist' as a catchall category to refer to Pentecostals and Charismatics as a group. See: Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostalism: A Guide for the Perplexed*, A Guide for the Perplexed (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 9.

[38] *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements: Revised and Expanded Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Company, 2002), 337.

between classical Pentecostalism and the influx of new converts to the movement when others could not?

The AG differs from most classical Pentecostals in that they did not have traditional Wesleyan roots. They eluded much of the stigma and restraints implied and required in the holiness movement. Subsequently, the AG found their niche by providing the liberty and freedom of the Pentecostal worship experience with all the associated exuberance, and Spiritual gift manifestations without imposing many of the personal restrictions of 'old time holiness' imbedded in the Wesleyan tradition.

While the AG was riding the crest of the wave, the COGOP was caught in the undertow, fighting the powerful currents that were bringing drastic change to the Pentecostal shorelines. There were two primary reasons they missed the great outpouring: 1) The COGOP had well entrenched doctrinal, and cultural roadblocks; and 2) they were oddly becoming less Pentecostal.

First, some of the doctrinal roadblocks were never official church dogma, but traditional and regional prohibitions. While the AG and others were embracing the influx of new converts, the COGOP was internally debating whether women could cut their hair or wear pants. Men did not escape inspection, as facial hair and length of hair were points of contention. As stated, these items were never addressed positively or negatively in General Council, but they were, in many congregations, more worthy of attention than the preaching of the clear, life-giving Gospel of Jesus Christ. Consequently, most noticeably in the southeast US, the excitement and power of Pentecost was being replaced with a form of Pharisee-ism. Just as first century Jewish leaders missed the religious revitalization that accompanied the appearance and ministry of Christ, far too many in the

COGOP were majoring on non-salvific minors while missing much of the Renewalist movement occurring globally at the end of the 20th century.

While these cultural traditions rooted in Southern holiness movement ancestry were correctable over time,[39] there was yet a major doctrinal issue that separated the COGOP from its contemporaries, blocking the door for the acceptance of new converts.[40] The crucial doctrinal difference between the COGOP and most other Holiness-Pentecostal groups was in regard to the divorce and remarriage issue. In 1927, after years of unsettled debate, the Church established prohibitions against receiving anyone into membership who living in a divorced and remarried condition. The newly enacted 29th Prominent Teaching of the church was titled, "Against the Divorce and Remarriage Evil."[41]

Phillip Smith said, "Initially, the church did not have to deal with this as a major and pressing issue because American society itself did not reflect divorce as an everyday occurrence. At the beginning of the Twentieth Century, one in seventeen marriages in this country ended in divorce. Divorce was relatively rare in American society."[42] However, as seen earlier, "By the last quarter of the 20th century the divorce rate in the country was

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[39] By the early 1980s most of the outdated cultural restraints had dissipated in the COGOP, even in the most traditional 'old-time holiness' strongholds of the Deep South. If anything, the pendulum swung drastically as the conventional holiness mindset was rejected to the extreme.

[40] In the COGOP a person joins "the Church" by publicly covenanting his or her allegiance to the Scriptures as the final authority. This is no casual event but is entered into sacredly as with any covenant relationship.

[41] "General Overseer asked the Assembly about adding the teaching concerning the divorce and remarriage to the teachings made prominent." See: Harry Lee Moore, ed., *Cyclopedic Index of Assembly Minutes and Important Business Acts, 1906 to 1974* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House and Press, 1975), s.v. "Divorce and Remarriage Adding the Teaching to the Teachings Made Prominent." See also Minutes, September 7-13, 1914, 22th Annual Assembly, 40.

[42] Phillip D. Smith, "Exodus: A Holy Nation at Risk" (DMin diss., Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, 2009), 45.

better than one out of two."[43] Even as divorce rates soared the COGOP maintained strict adherence to the 'one man/one woman until death' principle. As a result, the COGOP saw the pool of prospective members dwindling significantly.

Another reason the generation of growth and expansionism in South Carolina came to an end was their horrible sense of timing. With roots in the Classical or First Wave Pentecostal movement, along with the tremendous Holy Ghost revival, the Church experienced oppressive persecution and hardships as unbelievers and mainline church parishioners fought desperately to put out the fires of the Holiness and Pentecostal movements. According to historian Vinson Synan, Pentecostals are more, "harassed, persecuted, suffering and martyred than perhaps any other Christian tradition in recent history."[44] One of the first examples of this was seen during the Shearer schoolhouse revival in 1896 when opponents of the sanctification message fought the historic meetings. According to historian David Roebuck, "Those who testified that they were sanctified suffered violent persecution. Their churches excluded them, and they were forced to meet in homes and makeshift log houses of worship."[45]

When the Shearer schoolhouse revival moved across the road to a private home, opponents united to persecute the fledgling assemblage. Holiness pioneer, A.J. Tomlinson reported, "At one time the storm of persecution broke in with such fury that one hundred and six men, composed of Methodist and Baptist ministers, stewards and deacons, one justice of the peace and one sheriff, banded themselves together to put down the revival,

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[43] Smith noted: "In the General Assembly of 2006, the position of the Church on divorce and remarriage changed dramatically to fit the model of many mainline Protestant denominations."
[44] Vincent Synan, "Role of Tongues as Initial Evidence" (lecture, Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA, June 27, 2014).
[45] David Roebuck, "*The Shearer Schoolhouse Revival*," Faith New Network, http://www.faithnews.cc/?p=9661 (accessed January 17, 2013).

even by violence, if that was the only way it could be accomplished. They deliberately tore down and burned the house where sinners were getting saved in nearly every service, in open daylight."[46]

Unfortunately, such persecution did not end quickly as subsequent generations suffered barrages of eggs, tomatoes, verbal assaults, stones and even bullets hurled their direction. But, with bulldog tenacity, much like the first century predecessors, they ceased not to preach and declare the Holiness/Pentecostal message.

However, endemic to the Spirit-filled environment, there have always been cases of over exuberance and excesses associated with Spiritual manifestations. With the genuine there are always imitations. Additionally, Charismatic expressions and demonstrations are easily faked, distorted, and otherwise abused. By the 1940s and 1950s such extra-biblical demonstrations and manifestations became more problematic as they frequently disrupted public services. Often times, exuberant worshipers would dominate the worship experience, cause confusion. Holy Ghost messages and interpretations sometimes followed unscriptural rationale. Such prophetic utterances as those dealing with the exact date of Christ's return would instantly trigger ecstatic irruptions among the congregants, while requiring stern intervention and correction from leadership.

The exercise of Spiritual manifestations associated with the modern Charismatic movement such as words of knowledge, prophetic utterances, the calling out of specific sicknesses with a resulting promise of healing, and suchlike were commonplace in the church for half a century before the Second Wave outpouring. However, after many years

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[46] A. J. Tomlinson, *The Last Great Conflict* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1984), 140-41.

of dealing with an increasing problem of "wild fire"[47] there emerged an unwritten choice of "no fire rather than wild fire."[48] Thus, as America was warming up to the flames of Pentecostalism the COGOP was cooling off by downplaying spiritual manifestations. Sadly, when a Pentecostal church rejects the power of Pentecost, they become just a weak imitation of more formal churches.[49]

It appears that the COGOP was crippled by the incredibly poor decisions made during the last third of the 20th century, especially with regard to their Pentecostal heritage. While remaining Pentecostal in theory, in practice they became less and less so. And, there are few things less attractive than a 'Pentecostal' church absent the expressions of Pentecost.

Can a direct link be made between the Church's deemphasizing the expressions and function of the Holy Spirit and the concurrent numerical decline? Perhaps not, but Synan addressed the varying rates of growth experienced by denominations that rejected the Pentecostal experience verses those who embraced it. By focusing on the acceptance and rejection of the spiritual gift of "speaking in tongues", he was addressing denominational responses to the Pentecostal outpouring. Quoting David Barrett, Synan

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[47] The term "wild fire" came to represent uncontrollable and/or extra-biblical Pentecostal style manifestations and exuberances. In 1 Corinthians 14 the Apostle Paul addressed such uncontrolled expressions of "spiritual gifts."

[48] This sentiment differs from the earlier oft quoted Pentecostal position: "With every fire comes some wildfire. Don't put out the fire."

[49] This pattern has continued through the 21st century. However, the decreasing reliance on the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit has now become standard operational practice. Messages and interpretations are no longer tolerated, much less entertained in official church sessions. Senior presbytery leadership is now elected by majority vote while the Spiritual Gift of Interpretation of Tongues is no longer allowed in General Assembly forums.
When critiquing the meeting of the International Presbytery in which he was selected as General Overseer, Randal Howard criticized former Overseer and moderator, Fred S. Fisher, "for not allowing the Holy Spirit to direct the proceedings. He specifically said that the process led by Fisher was not a spiritual one." - Randall E. Howard. Interview by Philip Smith. Cleveland, TN., July 2008. See Smith, 179.

pointed out that, "by 1992 the anti-Pentecostal Holiness churches numbered 5.4 million in the world in contrast to 205 million denominational Pentecostals."[50] Supporting his premise Synan contrasted the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), and the Church of Christ (Holiness) from which it separated in 1908. He observed, "Beginning as groups roughly equal in size, the growth of the two churches is instructive. By 1990 the church that rejected tongues as initial evidence numbered only 15,000 members in the USA while the COGIC had grown to number 3.7 million members."[51]

It would have been problematic enough had South Carolina been the only traditionally strong southern state to experience stagnation. Sadly, that was not the case as the pattern was mirrored throughout the southeastern U.S. When factoring in population growth all southern states actually suffered measurable losses. (See Table 5)

In addition to reviewing the intense social and cultural transformations as well as the changing religious landscape in America during the decades of the 1970s and 1980s, it is helpful to consider the predictable changes every living organism goes through. Has the Church of God or Prophecy in South Carolina followed the same historical patterns typical of civilizations, institutions, business organizations, nations, and even individuals?

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[50] Vincent Synan, "Role of Tongues as Initial Evidence" (lecture, Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA, June 27, 2014). See also Vinson Synan, *Innovations in Mission*, vol. 4, *The Spirit Said* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1992).

[51] Vincent Synan, "Role of Tongues as Initial Evidence" (lecture, Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA, June 27, 2014).

Table 5: Church of God of Prophecy Decadal Data From 1972 – 2002

	1970 Population	1972 Membership	1972 Churches	1982 Membership	1982 Churches
Alabama	3,444,165	3,369	87	4,481	118
Florida	6,789,443	3,256	96	4,673	125
Georgia	4,589,575	4,539	114	5,428	143
North Carolina	5,082,059	4,679	134	6,287	165
Virginia	4,648,494	5,450	111	5,658	120
South Carolina	2,590,516	4,060	132	4,886	146
	1992 Membership	**1992 Churches**	**2002 Membership**	**2002 Churches**	**2002 Population**
Alabama	4,143	116	3,388	85	4,486,508
Florida[52]	4,327	125	5,310	126	16,713,149
Georgia	5,458	144	5,102	121	8,560,310
North Carolina	6,882	188	6,265	148	8,320,146
Virginia	5,116	126	4,595	115	7,293,542
South Carolina	4,745	146	4,352	127	4,107,183

During the same time frame, the COGOP was beginning to experience exponential growth among the nations. Unfortunately, the American church base lingered in what appears to have been a visionless, and directionless quagmire. (See Table 6)

Church growth consultant Wayne Ammons writes, "Everything in life begins, grows, plateaus, and then ultimately dies."[53] Or, as Charles Handy wrote, "We start slowly, experimentally, and falteringly: we wax and then we wane."[54] Handy illustrated this natural cycle of predictable change utilizing the Sigmoid Curve.

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[52] Florida was the only southern state in the survey to experience notable growth between 1972-2002. However, considering Florida's population grew by over 10 million, the growth is insignificant.

[53] D. Wayne Ammons, *About My Father's Business: A Total Quality Management Approach to Building His Kingdom* (LaVergne, TN: Xulon Press, 2014), 36.

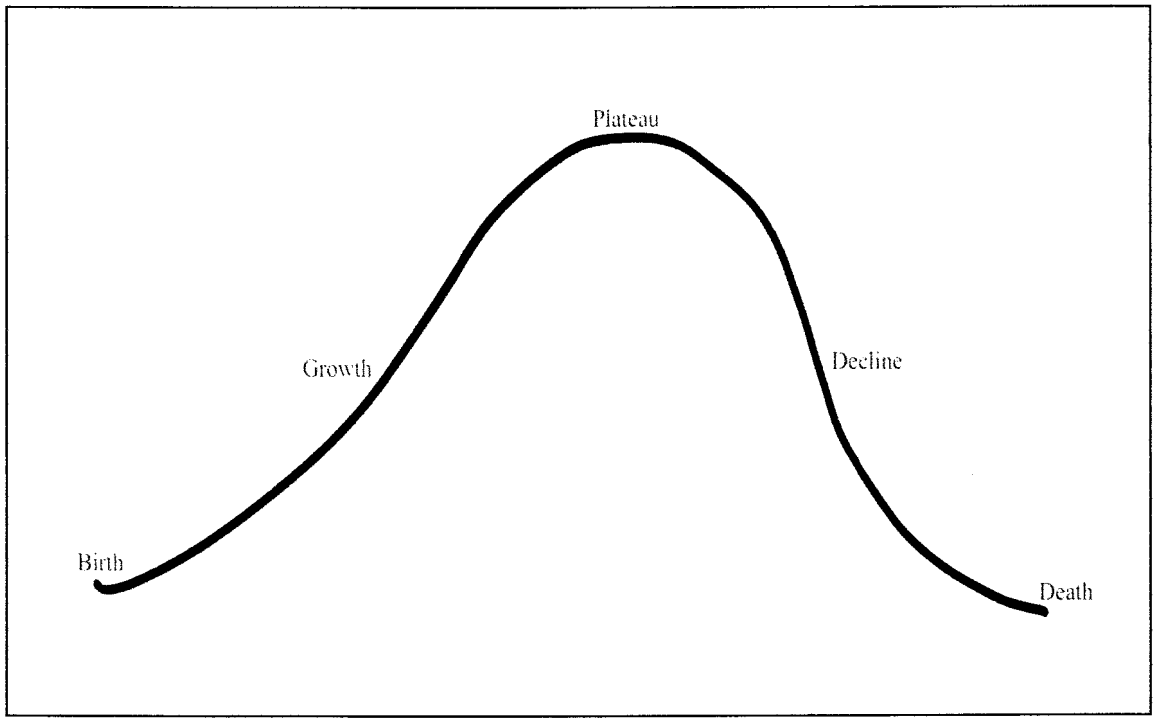
[54] Charles B. Handy, *The Age of Paradox* (Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press, 1994), 50.

Table 6: Thirty-Seven Year Statistics Comparison for COGOP, Domestic and Foreign

YEAR	United States Churches	United States Membership	Foreign "Missions" Churches	Foreign "Missions" Membership	Source
1972	1,657	56,997	1,288	73,923	67th Assembly Minutes
2010	1,797	87,337	7,707	1,399,246	96th Assembly Minutes
Increase	**140**	**30,340**	**6,419**	**1,325,323**	
% of Increase	**8.5%**	**53%**	**498%**	**1793%**	

The term Sigmoid simply means: S-shaped. "It depicts how virtually everything in life begins, grows, plateaus, and then ultimately dies."[55] (See Figure 1) The Greek, Babylonian, and Roman empires all followed this pattern.

Figure 1: Sigmoid Curve



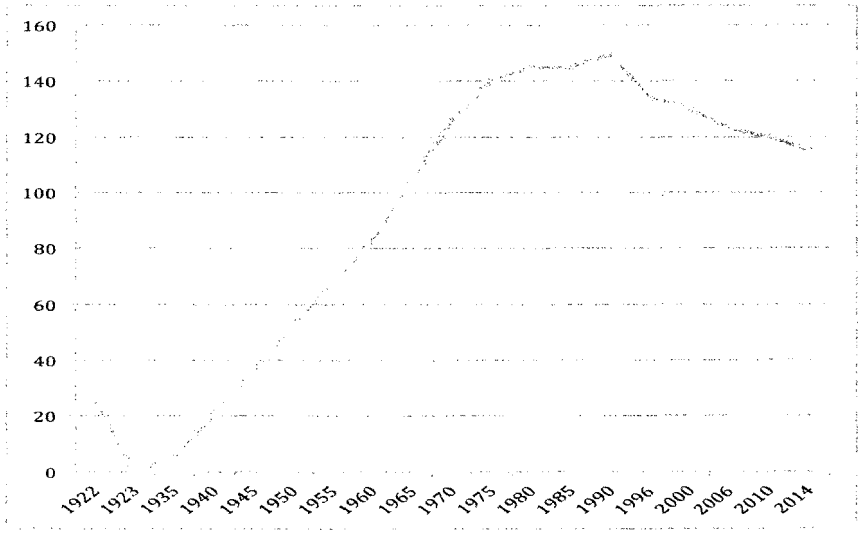
[55] Ammons, *About My Father's Business*, 36.

Additionally, business entities and industries are reflective Sigmoid curve physiognomies. According to Mark J. Perry, of the companies on the 1955 Fortune 500 list, 89% are gone.[57] This includes once familiar names such as American Motors, Zenith, Studebaker, and Detroit Steel.

Ammons observed that, "Churches are no exception to this pattern. A church is planted, and much energy, effort and devotion are spent to help it grow over an initial time period. Eventually, it reaches a plateau, and if nothing is done to move it off the plateau, it begins to decline. If nothing interrupts the decline, it will die."[58]

The COGOP in South Carolina mimics the Sigmoid pattern too closely to be ignored. When considering the number of churches in the state from 1922 (pre-split) through 2014 the process of birth, rapid increase (growth), plateau (stagnation), and declined is clearly illustrated. (See Figure 2)

Figure 2: Number of COGOP Churches

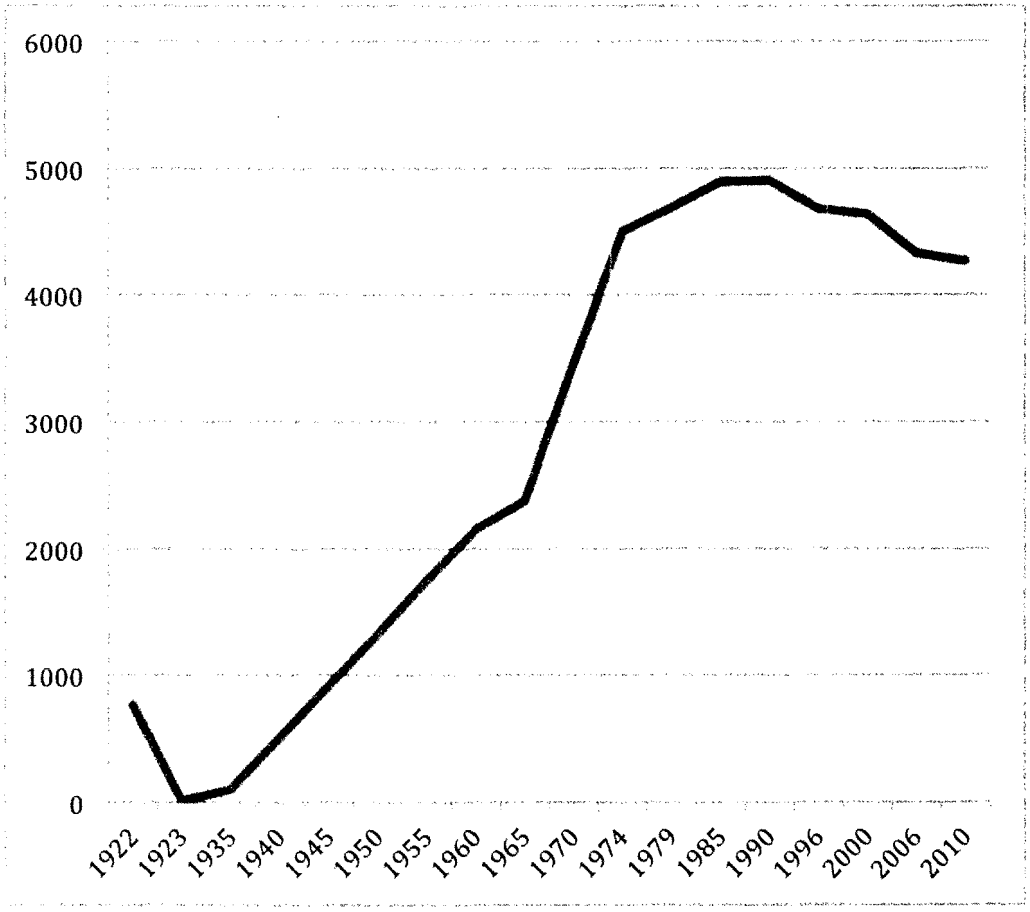


[57] Mark J. Perry, "Fortune 500 Firms in 1955 Vs. 2014; 89% Are Gone, and We're All Better Off Because of That Dynamic 'creative Destruction'," The American Enterprise Institute, August 18, 2014, accessed December 19, 2014, http://www.aei.org/publication/fortune-500-firms-in-1955-vs-2014-89-are-gone-and-were-all-better-off-because-of-that-dynamic-creative-destruction/.

[58] Ammons, *About My Father's Business*, 36-37.

This sigmoid curve is equally evident when viewing the membership numbers for the Church of God of Prophecy during the same time frame. (See Figure 3)

Figure 3: Number of COGOP Members

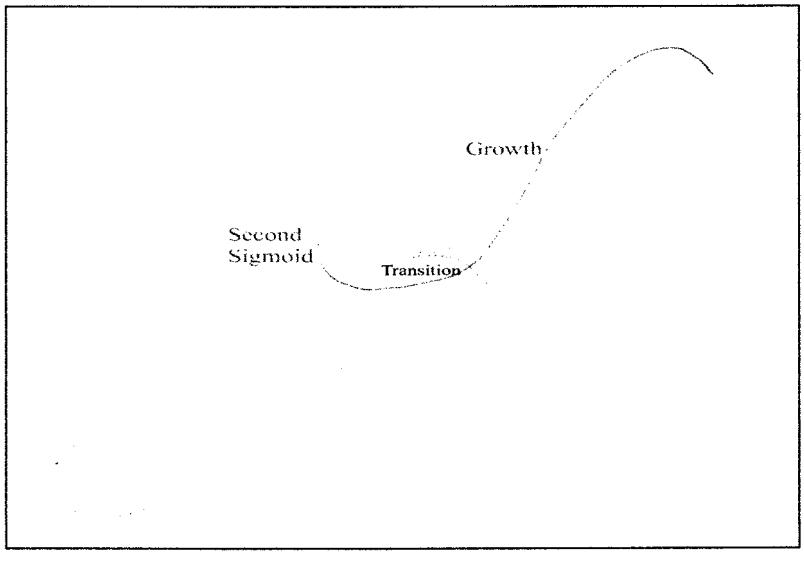


Is there a way of escaping the impending "death and decline" stage? According to Handy, "The secret of constant growth is to start a new sigmoid curve before the first one peters out."[60] The ideal scenario is to launch a second curved or growth period before the first curve has reached its apex. (See Figure 4)

[60] Handy, *The Age of Paradox*, 51.

Historically, the problem has been that leadership has not recognized the correct time to make essential changes. For industries it may require significant modification in product lines or operations. For religious groups there has to be an honest review and assessment of vision, mission, and methods. Unfortunately, problems inevitably arise when people become entrenched in the traditionally accepted manner of doing things. After all, "If the way we have been doing business has brought us prosperity thus far, why would we want to change?"

Figure 4: Second Sigmoid



Implementing a process of the fundamental change that is required in order to start a second curve is uncomfortable, marked by, "great confusion, uncertainty, and fear."[61] Usually, there is a period of decline during the transitional period before the new growth

[61] Handy, *The Age of Paradox*, 55.

spurt begins. This is a time when it is easy to forsake transformation and go back, as it were to the "leeks and onions" (Numbers 11:5 KJV.) of Egypt.

When viewed through the lucidity of hindsight it is obvious that in the 1970s upper-level leadership in the COGOP, and South Carolina in particular, could have capitalized on the momentum and passion of the previous generation by strategically planning for continued growth or the initiation of a second sigmoid. Unfortunately, there is no evidence of such stratagem.

The challenge is finding how to review, revise, and continually improve methodology without compromising one's core convictions. Without tampering with major doctrinal issues, non-salvific items could have, and indeed should have been addressed, but were not. A cursory review of such opportunities would include items such as:

- being open to progressive worship and music styles;
- pursuing new approaches to church planting;
- adjusting the church's outreach efforts to a better educated and growing middle-class population;
- examining the essence of biblical holiness verses southern traditions;
- recruiting and developing a new generation of ministers; or
- finding common ground for unified harvest efforts with other like-minded Evangelical and/or Pentecostal groups.

However, most egregious was the lack of a systematic plan for evangelizing the state. There was little to no sense of urgency to challenge the status quo regarding church plantings. Existing churches were clustered in familiar and comfortable regions while

large portions of the along the Southwest and Northeast borders received little to no attention. Unfortunately, this pattern remains unchanged into the 21st century.[62]

Lastly, a new growth cycle could have begun had the southern church not been overtly self-absorbed. Eschatologically, the COGOP remained dispensationalist. Simply defined: "The end times theory of dispensationalism divided history into discrete periods of time and argued that Christians would be "raptured," that is, removed from the earth prior to Jesus Christ's return of millennial reign."[63] Consequently, believing that Jesus would soon return to "catch away" His Church, the imperative was that all available energy and resources should be invested in reaching the unsaved and preparing the Bride of Christ for His eminent return.

On the other hand, since the 1940s there had been significant rejection of dispensationalism, even among prominent Evangelicals. According to David R. Swartz, "Rejecting the "kingdom later" view of the dispensationalism, some felt compelled to offer whatever measure of temporal justice and mercy they could in a hurting world."[64]

A deep-rooted spirit of exclusivity permeated the generation that was waiting for an inflow of believers who would join the Church.[65] Therefore, the perceived responsibility was to get things ready, because a mighty ingathering was imminent. Such

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[62] As of 2014 there is one small church (Dillon) in the five (5) NE border counties: Dillon, Georgetown, Horry, Marion, and Marlboro. There are two small churches (Gloverville and Calhoun Falls) in the seven (7) SW border counties: Aiken, Allendale, Abbeville, Barnwell, Edgefield, McCormick, and Saluda.

[63] David R. Swartz, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism*, Politics and Culture in Modern America (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, ©2012), 17.

[64] Swartz, 18.

[65] A.J. Tomlinson never taught that the Church was the exclusive 'Body of Christ' but others with influence did. The undeclared doctrine became more prevalent in the South. Song of Solomon 6:9; Jeremiah 50:5; Isaiah 5:26; John 10:16; Isaiah 60:1-3; Isaiah 62:1-5 were popular text among those who taught exclusivity.

images as Noah building the ark so the animals could flow in were used to illustrate this idea.

While the heart and purse were always open to the occasional penurious drop in, wider social activism was not an emphasis of the COGOP. Viewed from the pews the church window became a mirror. Instead of looking out toward a lost, dying, and needy world, many saw only the reflection of their particular needs. Additionally since a disproportionate number of the congregations were small their initial concern was day-to-day survival. As a result, there was little effort or resources expended to meet the physical and material needs of the communities.

The needy have tended to be receptive to the Gospel and the Messiah's primary congregation was composed of the poor, the broken hearted, the captives, blind and bruised. (Luke 4:18) If, in the spirit of Christ, the church would have had open eyes and hearts to the impoverished outside their homogeneous group they could have shared a powerful witness while blessing their communities. But, with the continual internal focus, the opportunity to seek and serve was largely missed. Sadly, the chance to start a new Sigmoid was likewise lost.

A review of trends, cultures, and historical processes has given some illumination to understanding the stagnant years. However, the declining generation can better be understood by adding the people, places and events of the period to the mix.

Prior to 1973 the leadership in South Carolina had consisted of old school statesman who possessed incontestable authority. They were "Tomlinson men" with total allegiance to the Church and the senior administration. M.S. Curry was one of the last living appointees of A.J. Tomlinson. He was a proverbial warhorse who had 30 years

experience as a southern Overseer before coming to the Palmetto State. He was also a man of remarkable wisdom and people skills who masterfully managed the state.

When he left in the fall of 1973 to assume administrative duties in Alabama, M.L. Hartley succeeded him. Beginning in Maryland in 1962, Hartley demonstrated his administrative acumen by successfully increasing the total number of churches from 15 to 22. After proving himself to be an effective builder in the smaller states he was transferred to West Virginia in 1967 with its 36 churches and then later to Missouri with 39 churches. Thus, when Hartley came to South Carolina in 1973 he had 11 years of experience in upper level administration. However, South Carolina, with its 138 churches, would be his first foray into one of the larger southern states.

Renowned as the outstanding preacher, Hartley's first year in S.C. followed his previous pattern as he organized three new churches. However, there was an undercurrent of discontent simmering among the ministers. Whispers of financial misdeeds slowly boiled over into outright accusations. While no written records remain to chronicle such misdeeds, the oral tradition says that Hartley bought some real estate near Pelzer and paid for it with state funds. This property was to be the site of his retirement home.

Much confusion exists today as to the exact events that transpired. Even some who served on his office staff disagree on the details. Jeff Hunt, who sold him the property, says that Hartley paid for it with a personal check.[66] However, Hunt, who served as state youth minister under Hartley said he had no knowledge of where the funds had originated.

Jerry Smith, a pro–Hartley supporter, recalls attending a large regional revival, held at a local high school auditorium near Florence. According to Smith, the auditorium was filled to capacity and Bishop Hartley's floor offering was very large. He heard Hartley

[66] Jeff Hunt, Interview by author, Fort Mill, SC, December 2, 2014.

direct that the check for the collection be written to the state treasury to apply against a personal loan.[67] Neither the amount of the loan, nor the purpose for it is clear. What is clear is that Hartley's personal habits and administrative style left state leadership and committeemen frequently asking questions.

It should be noted, that during this time frame (1973 – 74) there was a general sense of distrust germinating in all areas of American culture, beginning in the White House with Agnew/Nixon and trickling down through other realms of government, business, religion, and even family structure. With every leader's indiscretion exposed the shadow of suspicion would lengthen, falling indiscriminately on all in positions of power. Consequently, fateful foot soldiers that had unquestioningly followed upper leadership in the Church were now emboldened to scrutinize leadership as never before. This trend did not work in Hartley's favor.

In a letter dated June 1, 1974 General Overseer M.A. Tomlinson told Hartley, "I have received many favorable comments from your co-workers this year, but there is some dissatisfaction."[68] This letter was followed up with personal consultation from Tomlinson during the 1974 General Assembly.[69] On October 1, 1974 Hartley wrote, "Brother Tomlinson, I appreciate you talking with me at the General Assembly. I have tried to search my life and in anything that I've felt could be offensive in any way do away with it."[70] He listed administrative, personal, and family situations in which Tomlinson had offered him advice and reported corrective actions taken since their meeting.

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[67] Jerry Smith, Interview by author, Nashville, TN, October 30, 2014.
[68] M.A. Tomlinson, letter to M.L. Hartley, June 1, 1974.
[69] The Annual Assembly of 1974 was held in Cleveland, TN, August 20-16. As General Overseer, Tomlinson would call various overseers and denominational leaders to his private chambers for consultation regarding the status of their appointments.
[70] M.L. Hartley, letter to M.A. Tomlinson, October 1, 1974.

Unfortunately, the rumblings among S.C. leaders were unaltered by corrective actions taken. The state remained sharply divided between his allies and critics. The supporters championed Hartley's superior pulpit ministry and a reported growth in church membership of over 600 in 1975. His detractors continued to question his ethics, honesty, and forthrightness citing numerous perceived questionable actions related to the use of state funds as well as personal actions.

Tomlinson's hand was forced during the General Assembly of 1975 when two groups of ministers requested an audience. Supporters presented their case for retaining Hartley, while a separate group insisted that he be replaced. Tomlinson agreed with the dissenting faction and transferred Hartley to the combined states of Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island with their total of 11 churches. Obviously, Tomlinson's actions bespoke his judgment in the matter.

Further evidence of the General Overseer's mindset surfaced in a correspondence dated June 1, 1976. After only one year's service in New England Tomlinson informed Hartley, "Due to circumstances beyond my control, it seems that a change is being considered."[71] He explained, "You have some idea about the problem, and it grieves me deeply that it could not be worked out this year. I wish things were different. I've talked with you each year when I made the appointment, and I felt this helped some but evidently I did not get it over to you that I desired you to make good." He was obviously referring to unresolved problems lingering from South Carolina. This letter would serve notice to Hartley that he would no longer be employed as an Overseer and should seek ministry options elsewhere within the church.

[71] M.A. Tomlinson, letter to M.L. Hartley, June 1, 1976.

Unfortunately, whether justifiable or not, Hartley was now a branded man. When Florida Overseer, A.J. Coalter, asked Tomlinson for permission to use Hartley in a pastoral appointment, Tomlinson responded, "Brother Hunt, overseer of South Carolina says that if Brother Hartley would contact the committee and asked them to forgive him and give them some information, they would appreciate it."[72] But that statement pales in comparison to what Tomlinson said next, "Brother Hunt stated if Brother Hartley is used under appointment anywhere they will consider bringing charges."[73]

With the termination of Hartley's administration, the age of innocence and unquestioning trust also came to a close. When Tomlinson replaced Hartley with a retired military man, Howard J. Hunt, it was as if he intended to return order to the state by placing a no-nonsense, "high and tight"[74] disciplinarian at the helm.

Hunt may have brought a sense of order, but he did not bring the needed spiritual and emotional healing. In a letter to the General Overseer he said, "Concerning the reverses: Some of our ministers have failed the Lord and this hurts me. Also, our people still confront me on the field at times concerning the situation of Brother Hartley."[75] It is unclear as to whether the "situation" referred to was in support of or in opposition to the former overseer.

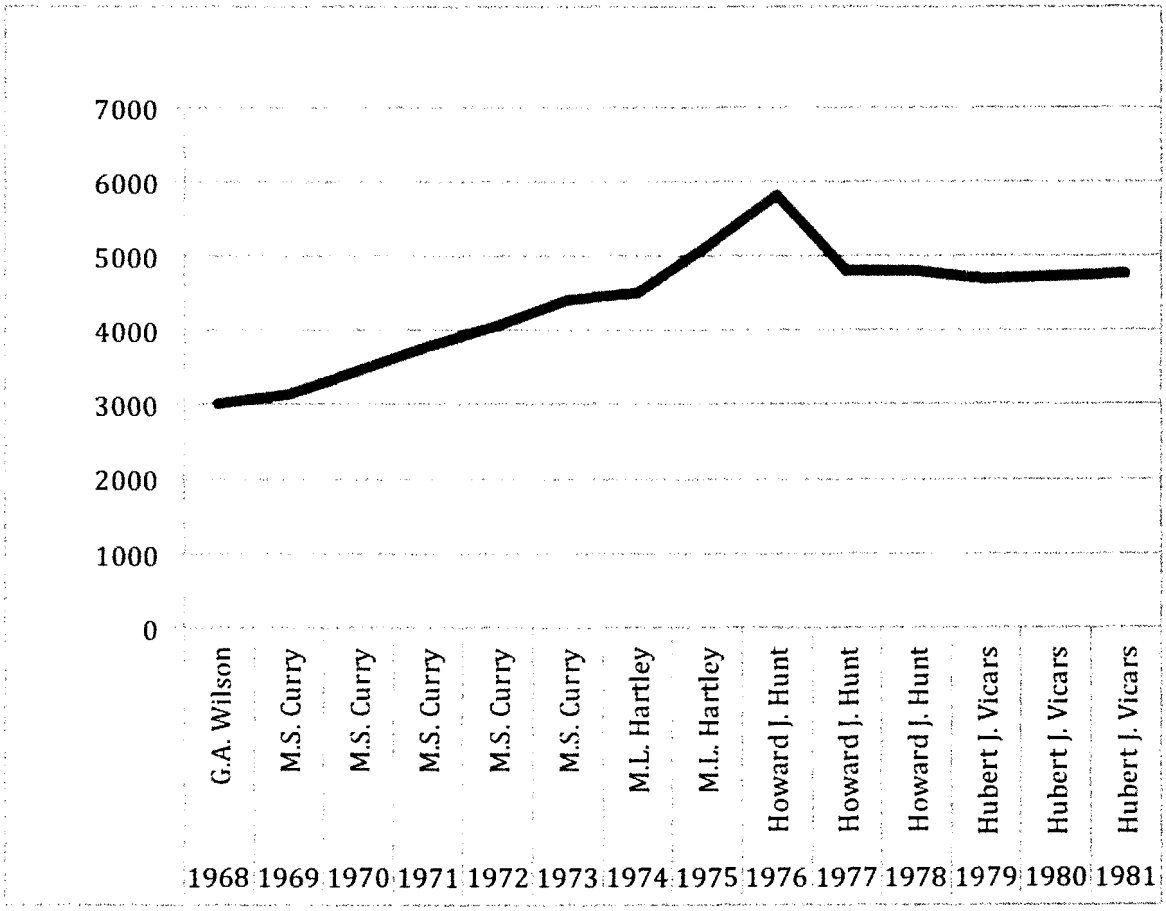
An interesting anomaly occurring during the Hartley-Hunt administrations was a mysterious and unexplainable spike in membership totals in 1975 and 1976 as an increase of 1,305 members was reported.

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[72] M.A. Tomlinson, letter to A.J. Coalter, May 30, 1977.
[73] M.A. Tomlinson, letter to A.J. Coalter.
[74] The term 'high and tight' refers to the extremely short hair worn by men in the armed forces. The term has been used metaphorically to mean disciplined, stern, and straight to the point.
[75] Howard Hunt, letter to M.A. Tomlinson, July 24, 1977.

No reasonable explanation has been given to explain the two remarkable years of growth in 1975 and 1976 that was followed by an equally spectacular fallback in 1977.[76] Former pastor, Jerry Smith, says that the increases were entirely possible since Hartley conducted great revival crusades across the state during his tenure, recording numerous conversions. On the other hand, Jeff Hunt says that while he served on Hartley's state staff he never saw evidence to support such contentions. (See Figure 5)

Figure 5: Hartley/Hunt Membership Spike 1974-77



[76] According to official church records, membership increased by a total of 617 in 1975 and 688 and 1976. This was followed by a reported decrease of 1018 in 1977.

The membership spike is yet another unanswered question added to the Hartley/Hunt era. However, it is helpful to note that official church records cover the convention year that runs from June 1 to May 31 annually. With the General Assembly convening during the fall, four months later, it is possible that the increase is accountable to the end of Hartley's tenure. This is especially feasible when you consider that in 1977

Hunt amended the data, decreasing the membership total by 1,018. A revealing glimpse of the two men's operational style is seen in an explanatory letter Hunt wrote to Tomlinson explaining the significant decrease in State Convention attendance his first year in the state. Hunt described how that the chief registrar for the State Convention told him that, "Brother Hartley told him to just add 500 more on the attendance [*numbers* last year].[77] Hartley's accounting represented a liberal estimate while Hunt focused on pinpoint accuracy.

It appears that Hunt's successor, Hubert Vicars made an additional adjustment to the membership totals during his first year's report (1978-79) removing another 110 from the total. Vickers had spent many years as a successful pastor and church planter in Florida and Tennessee before entering the Presbyterian rank of overseer in 1972. After stints in Delaware/New Jersey and Maryland/DC he arrived in South Carolina. Unfortunately, by that time the state had unknowingly settled into the first decade of sluggishness.

Over the next 30 years subsequent overseers would fight valiantly, leading their willing troops in the battle for men's souls. It was much like the well-known battle for Heartbreak Ridge, fought during the Korean War in the fall of 1951 in which the struggle droned on for weeks, but the landscape never changed. In this epic battle hundreds of

[77] Howard Hunt, letter to M.A. Tomlinson, July 27, 1976.

soldiers lost their lives, as one day the United Nations Allied forces would gain ground up the notorious Hill #931 only to be pushed back by the North Korean army. This scenario played out daily in disastrous fashion as the 2nd US Division suffered over 3,700 casualties before the bloodstained mound could be claimed in victory.[78]

Likewise, for much of a generation, COGOP ministers and laity gave their lives without seeing appreciable evidence of territory gained. Overseers were constantly promoting revival and encouraging district leaders to plant new churches. Without exception, every church scheduled three or four weeks of revival meetings annually resulting in new members added to the church. Additionally, every year new churches were not organized. However, these gains were offset by a large number of members removed from church fellowship for various offenses and multiple churches disbanded.

Prior to 1960 there are no adequate records related to church closings. However, a casual review of existing records list 63 churches in South Carolina that no longer exist. (See Table 7)

Add to this abysmal list countless other churches that grew too weak to survive, but instead of disbanding, they were merged with stronger ones. In total, close to one hundred churches have seen their witness silenced. Capsulizing the process Wayne Ammons stated, "A church is planted, and much energy, effort, and devotion are spent to help it grow over an initial time period. Eventually, it reaches a plateau and if nothing is done to move it off that plateau, it begins to decline. If nothing interrupts the decline, it will die."[79]

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[78] See: https://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/HEARTBREAK-RIDGE-Korean-War
[79] Ammons, *About My Father's Business*, 36-37.

Table 7: COGOP Churches Disbanded in South Carolina

Anderson, Westside	Greenville, Fleming St	Newberry
Ashland	Greenville, Guess Rd	Orangeburg
Bishopville	Greenville, Leawood	Packolet
East Bishopville	Greenville, Riverside	Pickens
Boonetown	Greenville, South side	Poole's Bend
Buffalo	Jacksonboro	Prosperity
Branchville	Hodges	Rains
Brewington	Homeland Park	Ravenel
Browns Creek	Joanna	Sellers
Camden, Monroe St.	Johnsonville	Simpsonville
Cassatt	Lawson	Six and Twenty
Cayce	Lancaster, White St	St. Stephens
Cheraw	Lincolnville, Hispanic	Springfield
Cordsville	Lugoff	Taylor's
Corinth	Lobeco	Twin Pines
Edgefield	Lockhart	Walterboro, Bell's Hwy
Fort Mill	Manning	Waterloo
Grand Strand	McBee	Whitmire
Great Falls, Hwy 21	Maysville	Wigington Springs
Great Falls, Golf Rd	Marietta	York, Hilltop
Greenville Hispanic	Monks Corner, Metts	Wrenn's Chapel

The leaders during this period of time were not unskilled laborers, as they all had good track records in previous assignments. Vickers was a tremendously hard worker, known for his unquestionable integrity and devotion to the Church. He was a successful church planter who excelled in ministry whether serving as a pastor, District or State Overseer. Following him, Harper Hunter had the heart of a true evangelist and soul winner. Every sermon and correspondence from him carried a passionate plea to reach out to the unsaved masses.

Following Hunter, Fred S. Fisher served eight years as South Carolina's Overseer. His strengths included remarkable oratory skills as well as unrivaled commitment to

education and training. Having begun his ministry in South Carolina as a 16-year-old boy, Fisher's love and passion for the state were unparalleled.

Richard E. Davis' four-year tenure following Fisher exposed state ministry to the influence of a caring, pastoral Overseer. If indeed Hunter had the heart of an evangelist, Davis filled the position as "pastor to the pastors." Ray Payne, another minister who was raised and began his ministry in South Carolina before leaving the state in his early ministry, followed him. Payne had been a successful pastor and overseer and brought his considerable skills in administration to his home state. He displayed proficiency in ministerial development and facility improvements.

In 2000, Kenneth Baker was asked to leave his pastorate in Greenville, South Carolina to assume the position of Overseer. Baker, a palmetto state native, had served under pastoral appointment for 20 years and had an intimate knowledge of the people and churches. The continuing downsizing of office personnel and aggressive outreach efforts toward the growing Hispanic population marked his tenure. Additionally, he facilitated efforts to relocate state office and camping properties to more effective locations.

These men, for the most part were outstanding administrators and anointed preachers who had been successful prior to coming to South Carolina. Furthermore, many of the ministers and laity they supervised were tremendously skilled and dedicated workers. Combined, that they were the best options available at the time. They labored valiantly to fulfill their office responsibilities. Although the church experience great gains in local and state-wide property acquisitions as well as facility improvements during their dispensations, the church did not experience the same levels of statistical growth previously seen under McDonald, Jones, Wilson, and Curry.

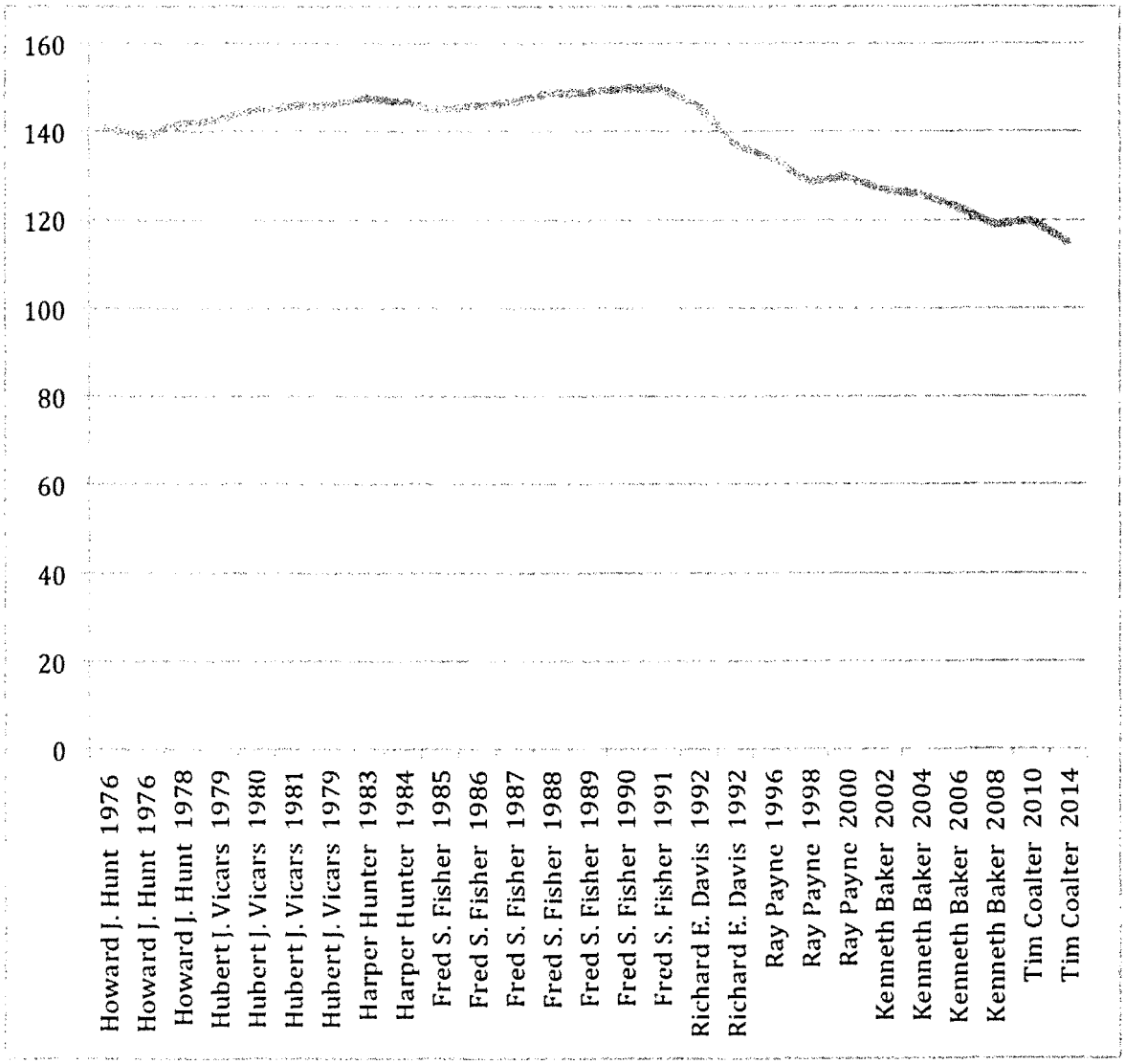
Perhaps, no one reflects the greatness of these honorable men more manifestly than Fisher. As stated earlier, his eight-year tenure was matched only by Baker and exceeded only by McDonald. However, as remarkable as his tenure in South Carolina was, it is only a small reflection of his overall impact on the Church. He began his ministry as a teenager in the late 1940s. District Overseer James Watson recruited him from his Tennessee home to pastor a small startup church in Nixville, South Carolina. While there, he met and married Betty Burton from nearby Ridgeland. Fisher continued his pastoral work in South Carolina, becoming a respected orators and progressive pastoral leader, before transitioning to the international headquarters church in Cleveland, Tennessee in the late 1960s.

From the Cleveland pastorate, Fisher was assigned to State Overseer work, initially to Kansas for six years, then to Kentucky for nine. After eight years in South Carolina Fisher was transferred to Virginia where he remained until 1998. At that time he was selected as the first Presbyter over North America, given oversight responsibility over all US and Canadian ministries. Two years later, when General Overseer Billy Murray retired from office, Fisher was selected as his successor and served for six years before his retirement in 2006. His 36 years in Presbyterian leadership leaves a record matched by few, both in duration and influence. Upon retiring from international responsibilities, Fisher returned to South Carolina to assume the pastorate of the Clemson/E. Pendleton church.

However, even this extraordinary leader experienced only limited success in South Carolina. In eight years the state gained three churches numerically, but experienced a decrease in membership. Remarkably, his tenure ended the period of stagnation and saw

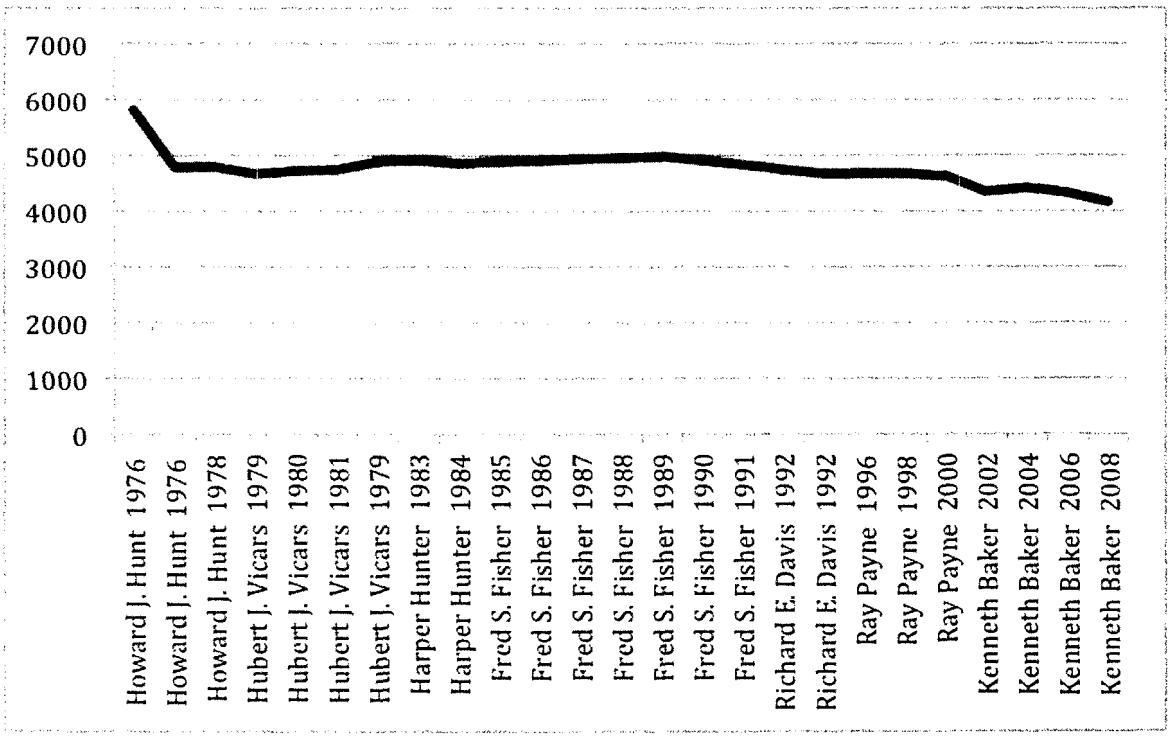
the beginning of subsequent years of decline. From the all-time high of 150 churches at the end of his administration (1991) the number decreased by 35 over the next 20 years. (See Figure 6)

Figure 6: Total Number of Churches in South Carolina 1976-2014



This decline was matched as membership dropped from a high of 4,971 down to 4,165 in 2008.[81] (See Figure 7)

Figure 7: Total Members of Churches in South Carolina 1976-2008



Fisher elucidated the difficult administrative task he inherited in a letter he penned to the General Overseer at the end of 1985. He said, "South Carolina has been one of the greatest challenges I have had."[82] In explanation, he lamented that 81 churches in South Carolina had less than 25 members with some having as few as three. Consequently, a disproportionate number of the churches (55%) were too small to exist without financial

[81] This author does not factor in the unsubstantiated membership numbers of 1975-76. While the number of churches continues to drop, the membership totals have risen in recent years. However, current membership total of 4765 still lags behind the 4971 reported in 1989.
[82] Fred S. Fisher, letter to M.A. Tomlinson, July 2, 1985.

undergirding form the state treasury. Things could not continue as they were. The financial strain upon the state budget was excessive as these churches required subsidies for basic expenses, and pastoral assistance. Thus, state office reserves were stretched to their limits. Additionally, with fewer young people entering the ministry, it became progressively more difficult to find ministers to fill the pulpits of these smaller works.

There are several reasons for the inordinately high percentage of struggling churches. A significant factor was the self-survival attitude that became the status quo of upper leadership during the second half of M.A. Tomlinson's tenure. Tomlinson served in the highest office of the church for 47 years (1943-1990). His father, A.J. Tomlinson was a visionary and entrepreneur who was open to new ventures and willing to step out front to lead. However, "Milton Tomlinson was neither a dynamic preacher nor an original thinker."[83] He was an effective leader, in large part, because he chose to surround himself with young, aggressive, and intelligent support staff. A physically small, unassuming man, he was successful in leading the church in significant facility development including a new International Office complex, the White Wing Bookstore and press facilities, Tomlinson College, as well as a 10,000 seat Tabernacle auditorium used primarily to host the annual Assemblies.

However, in his later years, although experiencing tremendous growth in foreign works, North America lacked a true sense of mission and direction. State Overseers knew an unwritten rule in order to survive and maintain their position they were required to organize at least one new church annually, and increase auxiliary offerings by 10%. The trickle-down effect was that district overseers and pastors were always encouraged (pressured) to meet these goals. Subsequently, as new churches were planted each year, far

[83] Smith, "Exodus: A Holy Nation at Risk," 58.

too many were not established because of need or vision, but only to fulfill a mandate for increase.

In the early years of rapid expansionism churches were organized in new villages and towns after an extended period of tent or storefront revival meetings. The majority of the congregation was made up of new conversions, or at least new converts to the COGOP. However, this dynamic changed, as fewer ministers were willing to do the footwork of church planting. More and more church plants in the 1970s and 1980s were the product of shifting members from existing churches to new locations. This process was not necessarily wrong if the transitions were generated by genuine need.

However, frequently churches were planted within blocks of preexisting ones. Sometimes small villages, with matching populations, would host multiple small congregations. Prevailing spiritual immaturity meant that occasionally a church would be organized simply because some members were unsatisfied with their status or leadership positions in existing churches. But, the most damaging motive for new church plants surfaced when obstinate members refused to submit to local church authority. Instead of following biblical principles for repentance, reconciliation and possible restoration, it was easier and more convenient to simply move the disgruntled persons a few miles down the road and organize a new work.

The deep seeded tragedy of churches organized out of such conflict is that they seldom succeeded. Even though the parishioners worked extremely hard and gave beyond their means in an effort to justify their existence, the favor of God was not evident among them. Sadly, many sincere and dedicated pastors were sent as sacrificial lambs to pour out their lives before the altars of rebellion in such churches leading many to feel misused,

abused, and defeated. This resulted in a large percentage ultimately leaving the ministry. While some of these churches remained in existence for years, there was a prevailing sense of heaviness or depression that hung over the congregations until such a time as spiritual renewal would generate genuine repentance and reconciliation or until the original, obstinate parties ceased to be a part of the church (by death or by being disfellowshipped) and new congregants who had not been part of the original conflict assumed leadership.

Consequently, when Tomlinson who had become increasingly feeble resigned in 1990 his successor Billy Murray ushered in a different administrative philosophy with regard to the preponderance of churches too weak to function. Murray had served in various administrative positions including state overseer. He was well aware of the small church dynamics affecting most states and was open to considering options to relieve the stress generated by the existence of too many small churches, and too few qualified pastors.

Complicating matters was a total revamping of the general church's financial system. In 1994 the International Church body began a process of systematically transitioning the corporate financial system. The portion of local church tithes and surpluses funds that had historically been allocated for support of state office ventures was redistributed, leaving more income available to the local church. Conversely, by 2000 the funds allocated for state office operation was reduced by approximately 50%.[84] This meant that monies that had previously been allocated for overall state administration were no longer available. Hard choices had to be made with regard to office staff, facility

[84] See Report Of The Ways And Means Committee Adaptation Of The Current Financial System To Biblical Principles, *Minutes of the 88th Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1994), 69-76.

maintenance, and even the option of liquidating of state assets. Among the first casualties were the small churches that had struggled for years and could no longer exist without supplemental support.

The obvious solution was to disband or merge many of these struggling churches. (See Table 7) This process of downsizing continued for over a decade. A reversal of at least 10% in the stock market to adjust for overvaluation is called a "correction." Perhaps this is what was happening in the church. After years of adding churches without increasing membership a necessary numerical "correction" was inevitable.

While it is true that a rising tide raises all boats, it is equally true that when the tide goes out and the boat has been beached, only then does one see the cracks in the hull, the barnacle, the rust, and the faded paint. Similarly, as the church lingered in a stagnant condition and even saw the tides of growth slowly decline, long existing problems that had previously been overlooked became blatantly obvious. Confidence in the "old Ship of Zion" slowly deteriorated. In an absence of fresh vision, many of the best and brightest perished, mutinied, or simply abandoned ship.[85]

The stagnant and declining generation witnessed the systematic closing of church educational entities such as Bible Training Institute and Tomlinson College, the later supposedly due to a financial crisis. Running concurrent with the closing of these church institutions was a rejection of corporate heritage, an alienation from the Tomlinson name and vision, a gradual erosion of the church's Wesleyan Holiness doctrine of Entire Sanctification, and a growing desire to become more mainstream Pentecostal in doctrine, and polity. In short, like the "double minded man" (James 1:8 KJV) identified in James'

[85] See Phillip D. Smith, "Exodus: A Holy Nation at Risk" (DMin diss., Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, 2009).

Epistle the church became increasingly unstable. And, as it struggled internally with questions of holiness, exclusivity, and heritage the COGOP eventually lost its sense of their identity.

The previous generations of church fathers had been less educated but tremendously powerful prayer warriors. E.A. McDonald was known to spend weeks in prayer and fasting before making pastoral decisions. During the years of rapid increase even the most successful pastors, having the highest seniority would acquiesce to the will of leadership, often times accepting lesser paying positions for the greater good of the church. However, as trust and confidence in leadership diminished so did the willingness to blindly accept appointments.

Don Kremer wrote, "The name "Laodicea" means "rule of the people."""[86] At a time when the COGOP in the south mimicked the Laodiceans' desire for self-determination, they were likewise deceived about their own spiritual poverty and blindness (Revelation 3:17-19 KJV). As the church became less reliant on the leading of the Holy Spirit and more dependent on popular vote, they, in essence becoming less theological and more democratic in governance. Whereas the early church declared, "For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us" (Acts 15:28) their spiritual heirs amended that to say, "It seemed good to us."

Thus, you have the perfect storm. Cultural events were changing the very fiber of American society. The religious environment was cooling as nationwide church attendance decreased. At the same time the charismatic movement was supplanting classical Pentecostalism as the face and voice of Spirit-filled believers. Added to this,

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[86] Don Kremer, *The Chronological Order of Revelation: A Step by Step Guide to the Coming Rapture and Beyond* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2007), 75.

after a generation of miraculous expansionism, the church reached a plateau with no identifiable vision or plan for initiating a new expansion and growth cycle. And finally, the prevailing attitude of disrespect for leaders and rebellion against authority found ample expression inside the hallowed sanctuary of the church. This dynamic quartet of elements came together at once, effectively ending the golden era of church.

CHAPTER 9. CONCLUSION

Showers of blessing, Showers of blessing we need;
Mercy-drops round us are falling, But for the showers we plead.
–James McGranahan[1]

It would be inaccurate to say that the last two decades of ministry for the Church of God of Prophecy in South Carolina have been years of total failure barren of spiritual fruit. It would be equally erroneous to declare robust success. Pessimist or optimist will view the period according to their own presuppositions.

Former State Overseer Harper Hunter would illustrate the value of a "never dying soul" by asking congregants to imagine the number one (1) followed by a comma printed in one-inch lettering at the top of the wall near the ceiling of the church. Then, he asked them to continue with three zeros and a comma, continuously until the number completely encircled the church. He would then say, "Place a dollar sign at the front and if you can determine the worth of that number, you still would not equal the value of an eternal soul."

While the spiritual harvest experienced in the COGOP from 1973 to 2010 did not keep pace with exponential progress of their ancestors,[2] nevertheless, for the thousands who were converted, baptized, experienced healing (both spiritually and physically), found help, counsel, and comfort during seasons of distress, something happened through the ministry auspices of the COGOP that unquestionably impacted their lives, and more

[1] James McGranahan, *There Shall Be Showers of Blessings* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1957), 362.
[2] It is patently unfair to equate results in ministry with efforts. Some of God's greatest servants experienced limited visible success during their lifetime, but nonetheless, their record of faithfulness is celebrated in heaven.

importantly, eternity.

Legendary syndicated columnist, Paul Harvey, would irradiate positive happenings by use of the thought-provoking double negative: "We are not doing nothing about . . ."[3] Borrowing from Harvey, it can be said that the Church in South Carolina was, "not doing nothing." In 1983 alone, Hunter reported that state ministers had preached approximately 30,000 sermons resulting in over 3,200 conversions, almost 1,700 testified of experiencing entire sanctification, with another 1,100 receiving Holy Spirit baptism.[4] Such annual reports were not uncommon.

One should never discount the sincerity of loyal ministers, and laity, who prayed, fasted, interceded for the unsaved, and gave faithfully of their time and finances in an effort to reach the lost with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to fulfill the Great Commission. In many cases they fought against the swift tide of worldly opposition until they exhausted their health and wealth. Their labor was surely not in vain.

Commonly, when a Southerner is asked, "How are you doing?" he may respond, "I'm hanging in there." Admittedly, those who are "hanging in there" can also be said to be, "holding their own." The respondent could be saying, "I haven't lost anything, and I haven't gained anything, but I'm holding on to what I have." While many can take pride in sustaining the status quo, Jesus called such maintenance labors, "wicked," "slothful" and "unprofitable" servants. (Matt. 25:26, 30 KJV) Consequently, the reward for such a one who was, "holding his own" was banishment from the Lord's service "into outer darkness,

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[3] For an illustration of Harvey's masterful style, see: Paul Harvey, "Paul Harvey (Editorial): Can Science Recover Its Fumble?," *Florence Times, Tri-Cities Daily*, January 15, 1971.

[4] Due to the Church's Armenian theology, it is difficult to determine how many of these conversion experiences may have been a result of "backsliders" returning to the Lord. However, the reports of spiritual renewal cannot be taken lightly.

where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 25:30 NLT).[5]

Although the COGOP in South Carolina experienced an increase in total membership between 1973 and 1990, the growth rate of 11% was less than one third that of the general population which grew by 35% during the same time frame.[6] If church growth records were dismal in the 70s and 80s they were abysmal over the next two decades. (See Table 8 & Figure 8)

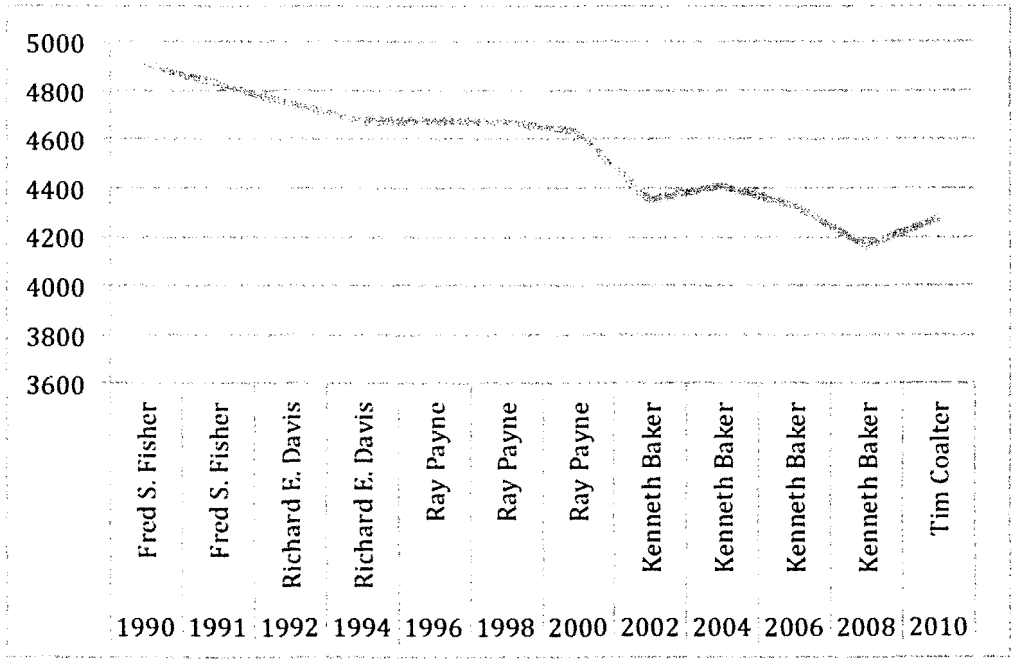
Table 8: Church Membership Totals From 1973-1990

Year	Overseer	Membership	Growth	Source
1990	Fred S. Fisher	4906	-65	85th Assembly Minutes
1991	Fred S. Fisher	4830	-76	86th Assembly Minutes
1992	Richard E. Davis	4745	-85	87th Assembly Minutes
1994	Richard E. Davis	4680	-65	88th Assembly Minutes
1996	Ray Payne	4676	-4	89th Assembly Minutes
1998	Ray Payne	4671	-5	90th Assembly Minutes
2000	Ray Payne	4637	-34	91st Assembly Minutes
2002	Kenneth Baker	4352	-285	92nd Assembly Minutes
2004	Kenneth Baker	4412	60	93rd Assembly Minutes
2006	Kenneth Baker	4330	-82	94th Assembly Minutes
2008	Kenneth Baker	4165	-165	95th Assembly Minutes
2010	Tim Coalter	4273	108	96st Assembly Minutes

[5] Similarly, the 'lukewarm' church of the Laodicieans was threatened with expulsion from the body. (Rev. 3:16) Whether this was a loss of salvation or simply a separation from the favor of Christ, it was nevertheless a striking rejection for the unprofitable servants. However, it must be remembered that only God sees the heart and He alone is qualified to judge the purity of one's sacrifice.

[6] South Carolina's population grew from 2.6 million in the early 70s to 3.5 million in 1990 or 35%. During the time frame COGOP membership grew from 4417 to 4906 or 11%.

Figure 8: Church Membership Totals From 1973-1990



Subsequent to the detrimental influences of the 70s and 80s mentioned in chapter eight, the church was hindered by two additional decades of internal trauma. As Milton Tomlinson grew older, he became more conservative and unwilling to consider modifying church teachings. His retirement in 1990 effectively put an end to 87 years of Tomlinson family leadership. Doctrinal and polity issues that had long been untouchable were now fair game for review and adjustment. Even as he was cleaning out his office, liberal reformists eagerly anticipated the death of many of the deep-rooted holiness traditions within the Church. Conversely, most Southern conservatives, including those in South Carolina, bitterly opposed any doctrinal changes and clung desperately to the "old paths."

Under the leadership of his successors, Billy Murray (1990-2000) and Fred Fisher (2000-2006), doctrinal "sacred cows" were slaughtered on the altar of progressivism.

Historian, Phillip Smith, observed that, "The conservative elements of the church have expressed a sense of betrayal as the church has become less Pentecostal and moved closer to mainstream evangelical Christianity under the Murray and Fisher administrations."[7] As a direct result of the infighting between the conservatives and the progressives, many in South Carolina became disenchanted, and disenfranchised. "Why" some asked, "should I attempt to bring new members into the Church when I'm no longer sure of exactly what I am bringing them into."

These significant internal battles raged for two decades beginning with the 1991 efforts to change the Church's long-standing teaching against wearing of gold for ornamentation. While the Church's prohibition against adornment had been on the books since 1915, Milton Tomlinson, upon being installed in the office of General Overseer, chose to establish his identity as a strict conservative by addressing the subject in his first Assembly sermon of 1944. He staked out his position unequivocally by saying, "When people wear gold, they don't have enough salvation to shine, so they put on something else to shine. It is my desire for all our people to leave off all unnecessary ornaments."[8] For the next 47 years Tomlinson refused to allow Assembly debate on the subject.

However, before the dust could settle on his retirement papers, in 1991 the Questions and Subject Committee presented a recommendation that the Church's absolute teaching against wearing gold for ornament be amended by saying, "We . . . recommend every member be extremely cautious in the wearing of ornaments for decoration less we

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[7] Phillip D. Smith, "Exodus: A Holy Nation at Risk" (DMin diss., Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, 2009), 7.

[8] *Minutes of Our 39th Annual Assembly of the Church over which A. J. Tomlinson is General Overseer* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1944), 106.

offend the conscious of a brother or sister."[9] This seemingly innocuous revision was summarily rejected, but the issue would not die and returned to the Assembly floor again the next year in the form of "A pastoral report of the teaching, as well as an exegesis of its accompanying scriptures."[10]

The plan was for all stakeholders to prayerfully study the "report" for two years in an effort to stimulate discourse and perhaps find a peaceful resolution. Unfortunately, before the 88th Assembly could convene two years later[11] (July, 1994) a group of Murray's most ardent and obstinate detractors met for a "Solemn Assembly" in July of 1993. This group chose former church statesman Robert M. Pruitt as their leader and summarily rejected Murray as well as any adjustments to the "gold for ornament" question. Although Murray sought reconciliation, the group who had been meeting under the unofficial title of "The Concerned" rejected any appeasement and started a new denomination called *THE Church of God*, effectively separating from the COGOP.[12]

Their split with Murray and the COGOP was bitter and vocal. Their modus operandi was to aggressively proselyte through the network of long time friendships and acquaintances in existing churches. They had firsthand knowledge of the disenfranchised who provided a ready-made base for recruiting. Even though they only succeeded in taking only a few churches and a small percentage of membership, much of their limited

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[9] *Minutes of the 86th Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1991), 109.
[10] *Minutes of the 87th Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1992), 92.
[11] The COGOP had convened the General Assembly annually from 1906 until 1992 when the decision was made to adapt a two-year rotation beginning in 1994.
[12] The emphasis was on "THE" as the group laid claim to 1st century linage, through Spurling, Tomlinson, et al. For further insight into THE Church of God see: Phillip D. Smith, "Exodus: A Holy Nation at Risk" (DMin diss., Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, 2009), 143-146. See also: http://www.thechurchofgod.org.

gains were in the traditionally conservative southern states. While they experienced minor success in South Carolina, the volatility generated by their constant berating of Murray added fuel to the growing flames of unrest and contributed appreciably to the period of statistical decline (See Figure 8).

Concurrent with the ornamentation issue, questions regarding the exclusivity of Church as the Bride of Christ came to the forefront. While the COGOP never officially espoused the position of exclusivity, unofficially, many ministers had for years preached that the Church of God (later the COGOP) was, in fact, uniquely the continuation of the New Testament church Jesus organized during his earthly ministry.[13] Oral tradition maintained that when one joined the Church by covenant, only then did they become part of the last day's Bride.

Much to the chagrin of the old-school contingency, Murray and his contemporaries eschewed the elitist viewpoint. At the same time, he systematically divested the authority of the General Overseer's office by embracing the concept of *Plurality of Leadership*. For those who had cut their teeth on Church of God pews, having heard regaling sermons and testimonies about the Glorious Church of God of the Bible and had revered the personage of the General Overseer with similar reverence as Catholics hold for the Pope, these ideological and theological changes were far more than disconcerting. With increasing frequency, this was the case in South Carolina as old school participants found their

[13] While A.J. Tomlinson occasionally eluded to the Church of God as being, "the *only* one of her mother" (Sng 6:9, KJV) neither he, nor his successors ever claimed that the Church of God was the exclusive 'Bride of Christ.' In a letter he written only a few months before his death, Tomlinson said, "I don't know who will make up the bride . . . Many of our people feel that the church is the bride, but I don't know about that. I have thought from reading the Scriptures that the church will constitute the whole bridal company. But I do not claim to know everything. (I do not feel I know all about these things so I cannot make positive statements.)" - A.J. Tomlinson, letter to F.E. Van Deventer, June 22, 1943.

foundations shaken to the core. Combined with other occurrences of the 1970s and 1980s the events of the 1990s further eroded the sense of corporate identity that many had long cherished. The question would be asked, "If we are not the Church of the Bible, then, who are we?" Sadly, the explanation that they were indeed part of the Universal Church did little to assay the pervasive uneasiness.

Undoubtedly, the most significant erosion of confidence came from a revision in the church's long held doctrinal stand against remarriage for those who had been divorced. The teaching "Against Divorce and Remarriage Evil" was made a prominent doctrine of the Church during the 22nd Assembly in 1927.[14] The essence of the church's doctrinal view for almost 80 years was that the marriage covenant is binding until death. The fornication exception in Matthew 5:32 was interpreted as when someone had a pre-existent covenant (first marriage) prior to remarriage, any and all subsequent marriages were fornication, therefore non-binding, as well as adulterous.[15]

The southern church, in general, was not ready to accept blanket changes to the doctrine. Even more egregious was the manner in which this major tenet of the church was aborted. Long before any doctrinal adjustments on the divorce and remarriage issue came before the church for Assembly debate, senior leadership in Cleveland was already supporting ministers and churches that were in defiance of the doctrine.

Taking a backdoor approach in order to facilitate change, in 2002 leadership offered new standards for accepting members into the church. Historically there had been certain test of fellowship, doctrinal guidelines that prospective members had to agree to before being accepted into the fellowship. But in the 92nd General Assembly an attempt

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[14] C. T. Davidson, *Upon This Rock*, (Cleveland TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1973), 284.
[15] Prior to the 94th General Assembly of 2006 the COGOP referenced 1 Corinthians 5:1-5; 7:2 to explain the fornication exception.

was made to remove all qualifiers and accept for membership any person who claimed spiritual conversion and had been baptized in water.[16] The southern church summarily rejected this recommendation citing that any person practicing or living in a condition of open and habitual sin could claim a spiritual conversion and documentation of baptism would thus, without other qualifiers or "fruit consistent with repentance" (Matthew 3:8 HCSB) be extended the right hand of fellowship and membership into the church.

Undeterred by this rejection, the Bible Doctrine and Polity Committee revisited the membership question in 2004 submitting that, "Regarding the Church of God of Prophecy, membership requirement should be an individual's experience of salvation (which includes repentance, denouncing, and forsaking of sin) and the public commitment to the Church covenant."[17] After several hours of debate, with approximately 30% of the delegates still in opposition, the General Overseer, Fred Fisher declared the issue to be a polity issue and not a doctrinal one, and thus, declared it passed.[18] Many who were in opposition to the report felt betrayed. Historically, nothing had been passed in the Assembly with so much opposition.

The death nail to sustaining eight decades of doctrinal consistency regarding the permanence of the marriage covenant (except by the death of one partner) came in the 2006 Assembly as all requirements related to the issue were summarily dissolved. This

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[16] See the Report of the Committee for Bible Doctrine and Polity: *Church of God of Prophecy Minutes 92nd International General Assembly* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2002), 67-77.

[17] *Church of God of Prophecy Minutes 93rd International General Assembly* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2004), 112.

[18] Until 1994 all Assembly rulings were passed only with 100% consent or agreement. However, in the 88th Assembly a new standard was enacted: Administrative (Polity) decisions are made by overwhelming consensus, while spiritual matters (Doctrine) are decided by the more restrictive one-accord principle.

included a redefining of the term "fornication" from the church's traditional view.[19] While the long-standing doctrine against 'Divorce and Remarriage Evil' was forever changed, the staunch supporters of the historic position did not give up without a fight. When the Committee for Biblical Doctrine and Polity introduced the section of their report titled "The Biblical Institution of Marriage" the opponents to the report assembled en masse. After many hours of debate, Fisher said, "In the judgment of the Moderator, based on the order in which we follow, we will hold these Recommendations over until the next Assembly,"[20] thus, apparently ending the debate until the next Assembly would be held two years later. Satisfied that they had at least temporarily stemmed the tide of change, many of the opposition left the Assembly, returning home for their Sunday services. However, their victory lap was premature.

Two days after the apparent defeat of the divorce and remarriage proposal, on Sunday morning, August 27, 2006 the moderator surprised all but his inner circle when he said, "The seven [General] Presbyters[21] talked with me, and then they met for quite a while; they gave me the outline approach of how we could address this again, and that was to bring it back before the Assembly."[22] With that stunning declaration the business session was reopened and the assembled delegates were asked once more to redefine the Church's doctrinal position on divorce and remarriage. After limited debate, and with 97

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[19] See the Report of the Committee for Bible Doctrine and Polity: *"Church of God of Prophecy Minutes 94th International General Assembly"*, (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2006), 152-175.

[20] *Church of God of Prophecy Minutes 94th International General Assembly* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2006), 89.

[21] The General Presbyters are leaders of seven separate regions of the world. Together with the General Overseer they constitute the Presbyter Board in fulfillment of the Plurality of Leadership principle required by the General Church.

[22] *Church of God of Prophecy Minutes 94th International General Assembly* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2006), 120

people refusing to submit, the Moderator declared the recommendation to be passed.

While all the actions of the General Assembly and those in leadership may have been perfectly legal under the governance guidelines of the church, and whether the doctrinal adjustment was biblically sound, none of this was as significant as the manner in which this monumental transition occurred. For those who had left the Assembly on Friday feeling relief that the issue had been tabled, only to find out on Sunday that their votes had effectively become null and void, the taste of defeat was especially bitter.

For the second time in a little over a decade the doctrinal Civil War within the church gave rise to yet another splinter organization. The leader would be one, who like Pruitt before him, had long been visible and vocal as a member of the upper echelon of church leadership. Wade Phillips had served under many senior appointments including State Overseer of West Virginia and director of Heritage Ministries. When E.A. McDonald Jr., son of the greatly revered former overseer of South Carolina, aligned with Phillips their combined influence was greater than their recalcitrant predecessors. In April of 2004 they enlisted enough supporters to organize as the *Zion Assemblies Church of God.*

With the strength and influence of the Phillips and McDonald names, Zion Assemblies, following a familiar path, initiated a vigorous enlistment campaign. Many of E.A. McDonald Sr.'s descendants joined Phillips' group. Their departure was felt most notably in the Greenville area where the McDonald clan had long been fixtures in local church leadership. While no church properties were lost, the COGOP was damaged by the defection of some well-respected ministers as well as between 100-200 parishioners.[23]

[23] There was litigation involving the Taylors church property that ended in arbitration. The COGOP won the arbitration but agreed to sell the property in question to Zion Assembly.

However, as with every family separation, the losses can never be measured simply in material terms. Far more disheartening are the accompanying feelings of deep sadness when one realizes that the family circle has been broken.

The downward slide in membership in South Carolina during this tumultuous time was briefly abated by a concerted outreach to the growing Hispanic population in the state. Actually, the initial efforts in South Carolina had begun in 1983 while Stephen Puckett was serving as pastor in Darlington. Puckett said, "There were a lot of Hispanics in the area and I was interested in trying to get them started to church."[24] But, when Sunday school superintendent, Jodi Davis, surprised him one Saturday by saying, "You have been talking about Spanish people, so I've got some coming on my bus in the morning,"[25] Puckett had to scramble to find an interpreter for the next day's services.

After this inauspicious start, with the help of a neighboring pastor's wife (Babs Sullivan) the Spanish class was soon averaging in the 40s. Additional Spanish speaking help was secured and the Hispanic work flourished. Puckett recalls one particular Pentecost Sunday in which 37 people were saved and, "a lot of them were Hispanics."[26] After he left Darlington to assume another pastorate, the Hispanic work continued, but lost much of its initial momentum.

When Kenneth Baker was appointed as State Overseer in 2000, the timing was right for a multi-cultural focus. He had displayed interest in Hispanic outreach during his pastoral tenure at Rock Hill when in the mid-1990s he had added a Mexican/American to his local church staff with the intent of ministering to the ethnic groups in the area. Upon assuming the Overseer's position, Baker naturally sought ways to reach every culture and

[24] Stephen Puckett, Interview by author, Piedmont, SC, October 20, 2014.
[25] Stephen Puckett, Interview by author, Piedmont, SC, October 20, 2014.
[26] Stephen Puckett, Interview by author, Piedmont, SC, October 20, 2014.

race with the Gospel message through the open arms of the Church.

It did not take long for fruit to appear, revealing that the multi-cultural focus was truly the inspiration of God. In September 2000, with the help of Ruben Uguise, Baker began visiting Hispanics in the greater Columbia area attempting to generate interest in a startup mission. Providentially, in February 2001 the English-speaking Overseer met Rolando Licona, a Spanish speaking minister who agreed to partner in a new church plant effort. Soon, a storefront building was rented and furnished. Ben Feliz, Southeastern Hispanic Overseer for the COGOP became a constant ally, assisting with everything from communication to ordinations. Feliz was the Church's appointed Hispanic representative in southeastern US, but his office was located in Orlando, Florida. Consequently the logistics were: Baker worked hands on with the locals and funded the missions while Feliz handled official duties such as ministerial ordination and credentialing, as well as legal issues such as questions regarding immigration.

Soon, young and energetic Hispanic couples began to migrate to Columbia. When Pastor Licona stepped aside in the summer of 2001, partly due to his lack of English-speaking skills, Wilson and Diana Gomez, along with Henry Ayala and Ladean Cruz assumed leadership of the Columbia congregation.[27] The younger Gomez and Ayala couples were more acclimated to the US and thus, provided a stable base for the emerging Hispanic outreach.

By November 2001 Ayala had assumed full leadership of the Colombia church allowing Gomez to plant a new work in Sumter. Then, Rubén Gomez moved to Batesburg where a new mission produced another church.

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[27] One of the greatest problems associated with Hispanic ministry involved questions related to legal residence. A large percentage of the Hispanic population in South Carolina was non-legal, which made long-term commitments difficult.

With Benjamin Feliz supervising Hispanic outreach in seven southeastern states, it was often impossible for him to provide the attention the infant churches needed. Consequently, the growing company of young Hispanic missionaries gravitated to Baker and became part of his extended family.[28]

With Henry Ayala in Colombia, Wilson Gomez in Sumter, Jesus Santana in Darlington, and Rubén Gomez in Batesburg it became apparent that South Carolina needed a seasoned Hispanic leader to help mentor and nurture the growing list of young champions. Consequently, in February of 2005 Arnulfo Cediel was brought to the state to fill the leadership gap. Cediel was an experienced Bishop who had served 14 years as Overseer of the Central American nation of Colombia. He had desired to relocate his family to the US at the same time South Carolina was looking for Spanish speaking leadership.

By the summer of 2005, Cediel had begun a mission in partnership with the Carolina Heights church in Greenville. A man of tremendous anointing and wisdom, his efforts paid remarkable dividends as the work grew exponentially. Additionally, the young Hispanic ministers benefited greatly from his tutelage and care. In 2006 Wilson and Diana Gomez relocated to Summerville and began a mission in association with the English speaking church. To replace them in Sumter, the services of Jose Luis Guerrero, another former Central American Overseer, was secured. A native of Mexico, Guerrero had served many years as National Overseer of Panama. His addition to Cediel placed South Carolina in the forefront of Hispanic outreach and ministry.

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[28] A sense of family is extremely important in most Hispanic cultures. When young Hispanics migrate to the US, one of their greatest hardships is the loss of close family ties. With Baker, the young Hispanic evangelist and mission workers had a father figure who encouraged the familiar relationships, often having 25 or more in his home for holiday meals.

However, all of the southeastern Hispanic work in the COGOP was technically under the direction of Feliz and his successors. The gap between the South Carolina Hispanic ministers and their assigned leadership was growing wider while their direct connectivity to the English-speaking church was growing stronger. As a result, on July 14, 2007 the Hispanic ministers requested a meeting with General Overseer, Randall Howard, in which they requested release from the Hispanic oversight and asked to be placed under official supervision of the English-speaking Overseer. When Howard granted their request, South Carolina became the only southeastern state in the denomination in which the Hispanic and English churches were combined.[29]

In 2008 Baker unexpectedly retired as Overseer, primarily over an issue involving the ordaining of ministers whom he felt did not meet biblical qualifications. Rather than violate his conscience, he chose to return to local church ministry. While the Hispanic ministry in South Carolina continued to operate under the auspices of the English leadership, the aggressive outreach efforts have subsided somewhat as no new missions have been initiated since 2008.

Reviewing the COGOP in South Carolina through a historical perspective has shed light on the early years of endurance, followed by almost half a century of purpose driven growth. The white-hot flames of passion drove leaders and laity to sacrifice everything in order to win souls to the Kingdom of God and members to the Church. Unfortunately, the years of success were followed by a generation of waning passions that unwittingly gave

[29] In the meeting with the General Overseer, Baker impressed upon the Hispanic ministers the fact that an overseer change would eventually happen and that they should not seek to come under his authority but be committed to come under the English-speaking Overseer. This transition of office occurred one year later when Baker retired from office. Unfortunately, soon thereafter, Cediel became discouraged about the doctrinal direction taken by the International COGOP and departed to form an independent organization.

rise to maintenance men and position seekers. More and more, the driving motivation was to inherit a good church rather than build one. Next, passion gave way to poison as doctrinal infighting brought about two decades of splits, splinter groups, and disheartened saints.

So perhaps, the imperative question is: Can the Church of God of Prophecy in South Carolina, and more generally, in the United States, regain the passion, purpose, and vision that brought remarkable denominational growth during the first half of the 20th century?[30] Every sincere follower of Christ certainly hopes for such an eventuality. But, can it happen; will it happen? Are there other aggressive church planters like E.A. McDonald or E.V. Cobb on the horizon? Do there yet remain foot soldiers like J.E. Evans who are willing to walk until their feet bleed, sleep in their car for weeks on end, and preach to whomever, wherever they find an open door and a hungry heart? Or, has that day completely passed?

Former Overseer, Harper Hunter, was noted for proclaiming: "It's Revival for Survival!" Christians across North America are yearning for another Great Awakening to sweep the nation and reverse the declining religious trends. COGOP faithful are no different.

The oft-quoted Psalmist asked the Lord, "Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?" (Psa. 85:6 NIV), to which Lewis Drummond reassures that, "Scriptures make it abundantly clear that spiritual awakening has been part and parcel of

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[30] There is a remarkable season of revival happening in various parts of the world. For the COGOP the past two decades have been amazing in areas such as the Ukraine, Africa, Central and South America where the gospel seed, once planted, is bringing forth fruit of hundredfold. In the Ukraine COGOP membership totals surpassed the US less than 15 years after the first mission church was organized in 1992. COGOP population in Africa now exceeds 1 million. Central America also boasts larger membership and church totals than the US and in Peru there are projections of over 1000 churches by 2020.

God's gracious dealing with His people through the ages."[31]

Stephen Olford described revival as, "the sovereign act of God, in which He restores His own backsliding people to repentance, faith, and obedience."[32] J. Edwin Orr's offered some distinction: "Outpourings of the Spirit are exclusively the work of God; but revivals are the work of God with the response of believers; awakenings are the work of God with the response of the people."[33]

If revival and spiritual awakenings originate as a sovereign act of God to which mankind responds, how then does one respond to the Divine initiative? Bob Mayer identifies three consistent characteristics of all revivals as, "United believing prayer on the part of God's people, a commitment from God's people to personal and corporate repentance, and the use of Scripture in the pulpit and in personal devotions."[34] Surely, these three components are underscored Scripturally: 1) Prayer; 2) Genuine Repentance; and 3) Renewed Commitment to Hear and Obey the Word of God.

The COGOP, as an international body, professes core valuesof prayer, harvest, and leadership development.[35] When Billy Murray succeeded M.A. Tomlinson in 1990 he inspired the church to "Turn to the Harvest" as outreach and evangelism were constant themes during his tenure.[36] His successor, Fred Fisher, has been long noted for promoting

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[31] Lewis A. Drummond, *Eight Keys to Biblical Revival: The Saga of Scriptural Spiritual Awakenings, How They Shaped the Great Revivals of the Past, and Their Powerful Implications for Today's Church* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House Publishers, ©1994), 7.
[32] Walter C. Kaiser, *Revive Us Again: Biblical Insights for Encouraging Spiritual Renewal* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 7.
[33] J. Edwin Orr, "The Outpouring of the Spirit in Revival and Awakening and Its Issue in Church Growth," February, 2000, accessed January 6, 2015, http://www.churchmodel.org.uk/Orr%20HS%20BOOKLET%20A4.pdf.
[34] Bob Mayer, Interview by author, January 5, 2014. Telephone interview.
[35] "Core Values are operating philosophies or principles that guide an organization's internal conduct as well as its relationship with the external world." – Brochure distributed at the 97th International Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy, July 26, 2012.
[36] Murray chose the theme of "Turning to the Harvest" for the 1994 General Assembly.

leadership development and this was no less the case during his administration. Upon his selection as General Overseer in 2006, Randall Howard's first directive was for all churches to unite in 100 days of prayer. He followed that by calling the international body to begin each year with 21 days of prayer and fasting. Each week participating churches are given specific ministries and regions of the world to cover in pray.

Since replacing Howard in 2014, Sam Clements has continued the prayer emphasis. A few months after assuming office, Clements announced that he was joining "leaders from the Assemblies of God, the Church of God, the International Pentecostal Holiness Church and more at [a] two-day conference being held in Fayetteville, North Carolina. The singular purpose is united prayer."[37] The stated goal for this prayer gathering, "is to seek God for revival in the church and awakening in the culture, with awareness that change begins in us!"[38]

Surely, heaven must rejoice at the commitment being made by the COGOP and others to seek God's face. However, for any people to actively move in the direction of the divine, there of necessity will be an overwhelming awareness of the holiness of God and man's absolute unworthiness to approach His throne while living in a state of unforgiven sinfulness. Drummond wrote, "True revival and the reception of God's forgiving grace never comes without deep and thorough repentance."[39] Thus, before times of refreshing come from the Lord, before sins are 'blotted out' and one can stand with clean hands and a pure heart in the presence of the Holy One, Simon Peter proclaimed that

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[37] Clements, Sam. "21 Days of Prayer and Fasting." *Church of God of Prophecy*. N.p., Jan. 2015. Web. 6 Jan. 2015. <http://cogop.org/ministries/prayer-ministries/21days.html>.
[38] Clements, Sam. "21 Days of Prayer and Fasting." *Church of God of Prophecy*. N.p., Jan. 2015. Web. 6 Jan. 2015. <http://cogop.org/ministries/prayer-ministries/21days.html>.
[39] Lewis A. Drummond, *Eight Keys to Biblical Revival: The Saga of Scriptural Spiritual Awakenings, How They Shaped the Great Revivals of the Past, and Their Powerful Implications for Today's Church* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House Publishers, 1994), 139.

it is necessary to "Repent and be converted" (Acts 3:19).

In 1984, God in His sovereign grace reached out to a people who were mired in the mud of stagnation. When the church gathered for the 79th Annual Assembly, the Questions and Subjects Committee (later known as the Bible Doctrine and Polity Committee) concluded their report by addressing a most urgent matter. In a subdued and somber voice they said, "Although we feel that all the matters to which we have given attention during the course of our meetings this year are important, one matter, in the opinion of this Community, eclipses them all."[40]

They professed that this section of the report began to germinate among them when they held their first planning meeting of the year. They added that they had been impressed forcefully by the Holy Ghost to bring this item before the Assembly and prefaced it by reading a portion of Joel chapter 2:

> [15] Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: [16] Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. [17] Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God? (Joel 2:15-17)

The report continued, "This Committee knows of no greater need to bring to this Assembly's attention than the need for repentance—the needs to fall on our faces before God, confessing that we have drifted in many ways from a vital relationship with the Holy Ghost, confessing a self-centeredness lacking in deep compassion for a world of people who are living now under the judgment of God to eternal damnation, rededicating ourselves to being the Church of God of the Bible. **God's message to the Church in this**

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[40] *Minutes of the 79th Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1984), 126-127.

Assembly has been a call to repent, and we must not ignore His voice. We cannot afford to continue the pursuit of our mission without convincing evidence of His presence and approval. There is no acceptable substitute for repentance when that is what God is calling us to do.[41] [emphasis added]

In their closing they asked all present to fall down before the Lord in an act of corporate repentance. They further requested that when the recommendations were presented for ratification in local congregations around the world that, "every local church at that time will likewise confess their failure in sincere repentance."[42]

One would think that with such a powerful appeal having been made from the business floor of the Annual Assembly, a church would need no further inducements. However, only four years later, again during the convening of the Annual Assembly there was a second direct calling to repentance. This time, the appeal was not given by a presiding committee, but was rather, a spontaneous action induced by the Holy Spirit Himself.

Pastor Rick Lyles from Rapid City, South Dakota was assigned the sermon topic, "*Making the Church Known.*" During the mid-morning session on Tuesday, September 6, 1988 pastor Lyles began his sermon by saying, "I've been involved in various methods of creating a public knowledge of the Church, but I am convinced that the greatest and most needed method is a manifestation of the power of the Holy Ghost in the midst of the

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[41] *Minutes of the 79th Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1984), 127.

[42] *Minutes of the 79th Annual Assembly.* It is significant to note that future General Overseers Billy Murray and Fred Fisher were members of the 1984 Assembly committee calling for church wide repentance.

Church of God."[43] Lyles went on to describe revivals that had erupted spontaneously without advertisement or preplanning, but were divinely initiated and Spirit generated.

At the conclusion of this shepherd's sermon a season of spontaneous worship erupted among the assembled delegates. So powerful was the manifestation of the Spirit and presence of God that the next scheduled speaker could not take his place on the platform, but submitted to the continuing work of the Holy Ghost. Sensing their urgent need of divine communion congregants gathered in small circles for a season of united prayer. Responding to the prompting of the Spirit, Bishop E.L. Jones, "came to the pulpit and reminded us that several years ago the Lord had asked us to repent."[44]

His exhortation was followed by a message in tongues. In part, the interpretation said, "My people, I love you . . . you have not repented. Many times I have called you . . . I beg you now to seek my face."[45] After listing corporate sins of pride and haughtiness the message concluded, "My people, humble yourselves today . . . Repent."[46]

The clarion call for repentance is not reserved for this generation. Historically God has repeatedly called for seasons of corporate as well as personal repentance. Of the seven churches of Asia that where addressed in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 all but two received the same admonition. The churches at Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea were all admonished to repent. Absent repentance, the Lord promised serious repercussions. Walter Kaiser said, "Nothing so separates us from the Lord as sin."[47] However, he offers an antidote: "Revival would come to America, yes, to any nation of

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[43] *Minutes of the 83rd Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1988), 20.
[44] *Minutes of the 83rd Annual Assembly*, 23.
[45] *Minutes of the 83rd Annual Assembly*, 23.
[46] *Minutes of the 83rd Annual Assembly*, 23.
[47] Kaiser, *Revive Us Again*, 45.

the world, if we obeyed the injunction of Scripture and confessed our sin."[48]

The apostle Paul bespoke the divine dichotomy when he alluded to both the goodness and severity of God (Romans 11:22). He also described how God's goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering are extended for the purpose of leading men to repentance (Romans 2:4). While it is true that all have failed miserable to live up to the biblical standards of true holiness and righteousness, God patiently reserves judgment, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

The Lord's stated desire is that any people would hear His voice, seek His face, and turn from their rebelliousness and wickedness in true repentance in order to regain unfettered communion with Him. This, obviously did not happen sufficiently in the COGOP because in 2002 there was yet another call for corporate repentance.

The 1984 call to repentance, delivered by the Questions and Subjects Committee, the standing committee responsible for reviewing matters of Bible doctrine and Church teachings. However, in 2002 it was the Finance and Stewardship Committee that made the appeal. Remarkably, the committee charged with the task of reviewing and recommending financial adjustments to the churches system did not present one recommendation dealing with such. Rather, they presented a lengthy, Scripture filled indictment against a prevailing spirit of self-centeredness, spiritual and financial arrogance, and disobedience to divine directives.

In the preamble to their report they said, "As we searched our hearts and minds in prayer, the Lord dealt with our Committee in several ways."[49] After reading Malachi 3:7 they continued, "We were greatly blessed when one of the committee members was

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[48] Kaiser, *Revive Us Again*, 59.
[49] *Minutes of the 92nd Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2002), 56.

moved by the Spirit to say, "God wants to help us." It was at this juncture that the Spirit of God moved among us."[50] They then told a remarkable story of how that the Holy Spirit, "arrested the entire committee."[51]

It is obvious that something unusual had happened to the members of the Finance Committee when they met to prepare their report for the upcoming Assembly. From personal accounts gathered, each participant had arrived for their pre-Assembly meeting with varying financial items they felt worthy of review. However, in their opening prayer something highly unusual happened as they were all instantly seized by a sacredness they later would refer to as a Spirit of prayer.

One member of the Committee, Jim Gilbraith, shares some details: "We were in a room for two or three days seeking the Lord and a lot of stuff came out. The Finance Committee was driven to their knees in prayer. I remember the Overseer of Florida at the time [Larry Dotson] – I remember him just incredibly weeping and pinned to the ground and saying that he had never in his life experience such a meaningful move of God."[52] According to Gilbraith, "It's pretty intense . . . but the whole thing about it was God was trying to get their attention. Like he was saying, "Hey you over here and you over there, if you want to be used by God, you have to repent.""[53]

Having experienced a life-shaking spiritual encounter, the Finance and Stewardship Committee ended their unprecedented report with no financial recommendations, but rather attempted to lead the Church in a prayer of repentance:

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[50] *Minutes of the 92nd Annual Assembly*, 56.
[51] *Minutes of the 92nd Annual Assembly*, 56.
[52] Jim Gilbraith, Interview by author, December 27, 2014. This account was verified in this author's personal with conversations with other committee members, Robert Davis and Larry Dotson.
[53] Jim Gilbraith, Interview by author, December 27, 2014.

> We, the Finance & Stewardship Committee, taking responsibility and accountability for this organization's stewardship, past and present, confesses and acknowledges before God and the Assembly that we have sinned (missed the mark), committed iniquity (allowed the fulfillment of self-will), not operated under the established governance (accountability), and have practiced and operated God-provided resources outside the principles and precepts of the Word of God. These actions indicate, according to Scripture, a spiritual condition of person[s] or organization that has departed from God . . It was in 1984 that the Holy Spirit called the General Assembly to repent . . . were our hearts really broken because we realized our actions had broken the heart of God? Can we point to a time and a place where we as a body became obedient to that call? Today, let's heed that call! **We ask this sincere body of believers to join us on our knees, entering boldly into the throne of grace, confessing our sins.**[54] [emphasis added]

Unfortunately, those in the highest level of church leadership did not take the call to repentance seriously. Many were heard to ask, "What do we have to repent of?" In actuality, there was a long list of unethical actions as well as unrighteous attitudes that could have and should have been confessed and forsaken. There had been a minimum of three persons serving under international church appointment that had been admonished for sexual misconduct. However, leadership chose to keep such issues secret from the general church, preferring to simply allow the accused to quietly retire or to reassign them to other duties away from the Tennessee headquarters.

Furthermore, much like the nation's leaders in Washington DC, church administrators were comfortable in facilitating the passage of business guidelines for all church entities, while choosing to ignore them in the International Offices. For example, although the 79th General Assembly in 1984 mandated that "general, state and local churches operate within a balanced budget,"[55] by 2004 none of the International

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[54] *Minutes of the 92nd Annual Assembly*, 62-63.
[55] *Minutes of the 79th Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1984), 133.

Headquarters offices or auxiliaries had ever done so. Similarly, in 1994 a policy for investment of international church funds was created and approved by the Annual Assembly. However, when directly questioned regarding the adherence to this mandate ten years later, an assistant to the Director of Finances admitted, "There was a policy put in place; there were procedures in place. It was not followed."[56]

Perhaps the most serious transgression, reflective of the extreme arrogance exhibited by those in the highest levels of Church leadership, is revealed in a letter written by members of the Budget and Investment Board (BIB) in 2006 in which they accused financial officers and senior administrators of intentionally providing misleading information in an attempt to cover up mismanagement and catastrophic losses. Alleging fraudulent activities the BIB said that, "Financial Statements and Financial Reports were not always reflective of what actually happened (Misrepresentations - Intentional misrepresentation or concealment of information in order to deceive or mislead is a form of fraud)."[57]

There was a never-ending battle between the BIB and the strongly entrenched headquarters leadership team. As often happens, those who had been in the upper echelon of church administration for many years and as a result had assumed ownership of their offices. In an effort to provide corporate accountability, the BIB had been assigned the duty of monitoring church financial entities and investments. However, their efforts to perform their oversight duties were constantly met with roadblocks and opposition. Too often, when administrative officials were confronted or questioned, they were arrogantly

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[56] *Church of God of Prophecy Minutes 93rd International General Assembly* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2004), 35.

[57] James H. Gilbraith II and Robert George, open letter to all International Presbyters of the Church of God of Prophecy, September 7, 2006.

nonresponsive to the Board's concerns.

Alarmed by emerging revelations, a representative of the BIB penned a letter in March of 2001 to the General Overseer in which he warned of the, "eminent danger of conflicts of interest and accountability issues."[58] In particular, the letter pointed to serious problems related to the Chief Financial Officer of the church and the potential for fraudulent activities. Remarkably, rather than heed the warnings of the expert professional advisors, the General Overseer chose to disband the BIB while simultaneously giving full financial oversight of all church funds to the C.F.O. in question.

Unfortunately, the Investment Board's worst fears were realized in 2003 when serious malfeasance came to light. Hundreds of thousands of dollars were mismanaged, misappropriated, unwisely invested, or otherwise stolen. By the time the 93rd Annual Assembly convened in 2004 the church was on the brink of bankruptcy. Shaken leadership re-commissioning the Budget and Investment Board, asking for emergency guidance to stem the tide of financial ruin as well as possible legal repercussions.

When the Finance and Stewardship Committee presented their report to the 93rd Annual Assembly, they began with a reminder of their urgent plea two years earlier. They commenced what would be perhaps the shortest committee report in Assembly history by quoting verbatim their confession and repentance from the 2002 report. To this they added, "Now, two years later, we the Finance and Stewardship Committee, more than ever, feel the overwhelming conviction from the Holy Spirit that repentance is still needed by this corporate body."[59] Their report ended: "In light of events that have transpired since the 92nd General Assembly, [we] did not think it wise for this Committee to bring

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[58] James H. Gilbraith II, letter to Fred S. Fisher, March 16, 2001.
[59] *Church of God of Prophecy Minutes 93rd International General Assembly*, 95.

recommendations to the 93rd General Assembly."[60]

While not much heed had been given to the previous call for repentance, in 2004, with impending bankruptcy and possible legal issues hanging over the Administrative Committee's head, the Moderator responded much differently. He stated, "I have already done a lot of praying and have wept before the Lord and any other kind of repenting that you think I need to do; I'm not beyond doing it. You're not the one responsible for it, we are . . . You pray for me, and we'll all just pray together that God will help us."[61]

Has the Church responded correctly to the repeated calls for repentance? Is there convincing evidence of a broken heart and contrite spirit? Regrettably, there remain significant indications of an abiding spirit of arrogance that has historically been prevalent in leadership. Jim Gilbraith, a respected businessman who has testified before Congress multiple times regarding international and national banking issues, has given much time and energy to not only assisting the church with financial matters, but also in efforts to change the destructive culture.[62] He observed how good people are brought into leadership positions who, "started off with a heart to do things right and just got sucked into the Cleveland vortex of politics and then just totally had no integrity [in] what they were doing."[63]

But, there is hope! When God's people truly humble themselves and pray, seeking His face, and turn from their wickedness, God has promised to receive, restore, forgive,

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[60] *Church of God of Prophecy Minutes 93rd International General Assembly*, 95.
[61] *Church of God of Prophecy Minutes 93rd International General Assembly*, 39.
[62] Gilbraith and his associates on the Budget and Investment Board repeatedly warned International Office leadership of the dangers of cooperate nepotism as it was common practice for International appointees to employ each other's family members. Of concern also was the lack of financial accountability as individuals on the Executive Committee approved each other's annual budgets. Added to this was the Headquarters hierarchy's resistance to operating under the International Assembly's 1984 balanced budget mandate.
[63] Jim Gilbraith, Interview by author, December 27, 2014.

and heal (2 Chronicles 7:14). Such displays of divine favor that followed sincere repentance have been experienced in South Carolina and stand as evidence of God's faithfulness to his Word.

On Tuesday, June 22, 2004 while Overseer Kenneth Baker was meeting with the Stewardship and Administrated Committee in his office, he was inspired to call a two-day retreat for the purpose of prayer, study, and to seek direction from the Lord. Two weeks later, on July 5-6, the S&A Committee met at a private residence near Santee. A Bible study was held entitled, "What the Bible Says About Money." Several hours were spent with open Bibles reviewing biblical principles regarding the purpose of money, God's plan, stewardship, and fiduciary responsibilities.

This was followed by an extended session of prayer in which some committee members lay face down in the carpet weeping in repentance. The general theme was that the committee had often made financial decisions based only on human judgment, being influenced by voluminous ancillary influences, without seeking or receiving inspiration and direction from the Lord through the Holy Spirit. Confession and repentance were followed by a commitment to change. They agreed that no financial decisions would be made until sufficient time was spent in prayerful consideration and tarrying, in an effort to seek the Lord's face and hear His voice.

The response from heaven was both immediate and overwhelming. Pastor Bill Vines of Summerville was one of the committee members involved in the prayer service. His church was building a new Youth Center and needed to borrow $350,000 to complete the project. However, Vines, who responded wholeheartedly to the call to repent, returned home to see the Lord open the windows of heaven and poor out immeasurable blessings.

Supernaturally, the Lord provided funding from unexpected sources in so much that the Summerville congregation never had to borrow one penny in the completion of their new facility.

At the same time, a much smaller church in Lexington had grown weary while trying to pay off an oppressive mortgage. God moved on a stranger who had never attended their church who unexpectedly paid off the debt completely.

Pastor Maude Pompey was struggling to build a new church in the rural community of Hobbysville. The Lord connected her with a man from California who incrementally sent enough funds to complete the task. All of these, as well as other such miracles of provision occurred with remarkable frequency within months of the State Overseer and his leadership team's tearful session of contrition.

Yet, all these events pale in comparison to what transpired a few months later. Baker was invited to meet with an elderly businessman that owned 122 pristine acres in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, only a few miles west of Greenville. On November 11th he met the 82-year-old businessman, Sam Huffman, who expressed a desire to donate his home and acreage, valued at three quarters of $1 million, to be developed for a new camping facility for young people. The Overseer did not immediately accept the offer, but remembering his earlier commitment, asked for time to seek the Lord for direction. He secluded himself to a remote area overlooking the offered property and asked the Lord for revelation saying, "I know you are up to something, and I don't want to miss it. However, I do not want to receive anything that is not in your perfect will, so I look to you for guidance."

When he returned from his prayer session, Huffman invited him to take a short ride to view an additional piece of property that he also owned. It was during the 45-minute journey that God revealed his ultimate plan. Huffman had never received the Lord Jesus Christ, but while traveling along the beautiful scenic highway Baker was privileged to lead him in the sinner's prayer. By the time the two arrived at the second piece of property located on Lake Keowee, Huffman was crying tears of joy after the Lord had completely transformed his heart. Three days later he reconciled a marriage that had been broken for 29 years. Within days his family was restored, and more importantly, his youngest daughter also accepted the Lord's life-changing gift of salvation.

Consequently, Huffman donated the 122 acres, complete with a spring fed lake and large home. To this acquisition a separate donor provided $100,000, which enabled the purchase of 48 adjoining acres. Another $600,000 was provided from the sell of the second piece of property located on Lake Keowee. Thus, in less than one year from the time that the Overseer and his Committee humbled themselves incorporate repentance God's favor was plainly seen upon the Palmetto church. More importantly, God's mercy was extended to an 82-year-old man and his household.

While there yet remain many questions regarding the future of the Church of God of Prophecy in South Carolina, the formula for success in the work of God has never changed. He has proven many times that he is ready to receive and bless all who are of a contrite spirit, who are willing to confess and forsake their sins, and who are committed to knowing and doing His will as revealed through His Word.

So, has the church in South Carolina experience a rebirth of passion during the last decade? Undeniably, there have been showers of blessings that have brought sporadic

refreshing across the state. However, it would be misleading to say these have been years of unquestionable divine favor and spiritual abundance.

Since Baker's resignation in 2008 the total number of Churches has continued to decrease. However, under the leadership of his successor, Timothy Coalter, the state has experienced a 14.5% increase in membership.[64] While there seems to be some resurgence of the energy across the state, figures are not available to indicate how much of the new growth is a result of the more lenient membership requirements related to the divorce and remarriage issue, or if it is a byproduct of a season of peace and healing from the scars of previous doctrinal battles.

A counterweight to the increase in membership totals are some glaring deficiencies: no new churches are being organized; there are no plans for outreach to the long neglected border counties; the congregations and church membership rolls are aging rapidly; likewise, there are more pastors over 60 years of age than under 45; there is a serious shortage of young people entering the ministry, thus, finding ministers to fill pulpits is a constant challenge.

Consequently, there remains an urgent need for a spiritual awakening in South Carolina. The poor receive the good Gospel news more readily than do the prosperous, so perhaps, some future financial downfall will spur a renewal. Or hopefully, God will sovereignly send the desired season of revival and renewal.

The COGOP in South Carolina was blessed with 37 years of passion, purpose, and power. Visionary church planters and soul winners extraordinaire marked the years from 1935 until 1973. Regrettably, the Pentecostal fire cooled, vision dimmed and politics

[64] Reported membership for 2014 was 4,765. In 2014 Coalter was selected as North American Presbyter for the COGOP with oversight of the US and Canada, and was succeeded in South Carolina by George McLaughlin.

replaced passion. In recent years there have been signs of a possible resurgence and one can hope that the spiritual oasis on the horizon is more than a fleeting mirage.

Thank God for every "mercy drop" that graciously falls on the soil of the Carolina soul, but it is for the 'showers of blessings we plead.' Until such a time as the heavens open and He pours out uncontainable blessings, most of the faithful will keep 'hanging in' and 'holding on', taking consolation in the faithfulness of the Father.

Perhaps the pilgrimage of the past four decades is best reflected in a couple of stanzas from Ron DeMarco's poem, "I've Dreamed Many Dreams":[65]

I've prayed many prayers when no answer came, though I've waited patient and long,
But answers have come to enough of my prayers, to make me keep praying on.

I've sown many seeds that have fallen by the way, for the birds to feed upon,
But I've held enough golden sheaves in my hand, to make me keep sowing on.

[65] Ron DeMarco, "'I've Dreamed Many Dreams'," Inspiration Peak, accessed December 19, 2012, http://www.inspirationpeak.com/cgi-bin/poetry.cgi?record=99.

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